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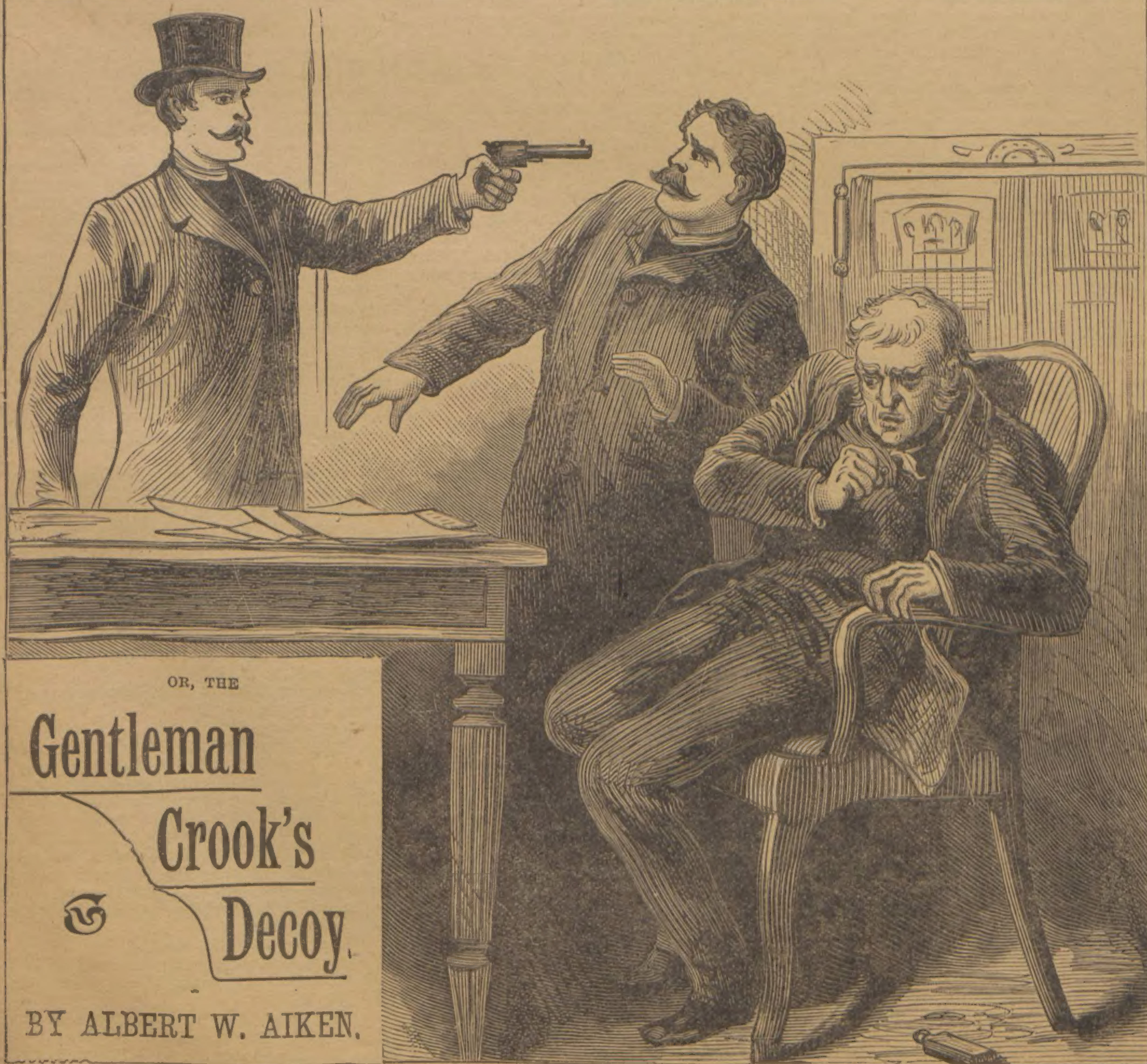
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JOE PHENIX'S MASCOT;



OR, THE

Gentleman

Crook's



Decoy.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

"YOU ARE MY PRISONER! HANDS UP!" JOE PHENIX CRIED.

Joe Phenix's Mascot;

OR,

The Gentleman Crook's Decoy.

A Story of Detective Transformations.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,

AUTHOR OF THE "JOE PHENIX" NOVELS,
THE "DICK TALBOT" SERIES, "THE
FRESH OF FRISCO" TALES, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE GAMESTERS.

ALTHOUGH it was early in the evening, a goodly number of visitors were gathered in Peter Weekly's palatial club-house.

It is of Long Branch we write, the famous watering-place—the "Summer City by the Sea."

One of the sights of the great resort is Weekly's "club-house"—a polite name for one of the most celebrated gaming places in the country.

This place is largely patronized during the season; staid and respectable men of business who would be mortally ashamed to have it known that they frequented gambling-dens, thought it no harm to try a little "flyer" in Weekly's place, just for amusement, you know, not because they desired to gamble or to win the money of the gentlemen "sports" whose headquarters the club-house was.

In fact, as many a man has observed, excusing himself for trying his luck, "a fellow ought to be willing to drop a five-dollar note after partaking of Weekly's delicious lunches and sampling his choice liquors."

That the lunch was a more tempting one than could be had elsewhere in the Summer City was very true; that the wines and liquors were the finest that money could buy, was also equally a fact; and as all were as free as the air to such guests as obtained entrance to the club-rooms, that guest would have been regarded as a mean man who departed and left no money behind.

Play was going on briskly, although, as said, it was early in the evening, just ten o'clock—too early for the greater part of the sporting-house patrons, who rarely appeared there until midnight.

At the faro-table a good-looking man of twenty-eight or thirty was playing a big game. He was finely-dressed, and from his appearance one would have said that he was a person of birth and breeding.

He had regular features, although a trifle coarse; the chin was strong and hard, indicating a resolute will; his hair, jet-black in color, curled in little crispy ringlets all over his head; his eyes were a deep black, very brilliant, with a rather bold expression, and his complexion was singularly white.

One peculiarity about the man was his long, slender hands, as white as his face.

The student of humanity who believed that white, slender hands were a sure sign of high birth, would have set this individual down as of the true blue-blooded race, a scion of nobility, within whose veins ran the strain of a hundred kings.

By the side of this dashy-looking player sat a man who was his direct opposite in every respect, being tall and thin in person, fully forty five years of age, with a florid complexion and fiery-red side-whiskers, with hair of the same hue, which gave him a rather odd appearance.

He was neatly dressed in a dark suit, and from his peculiar angular and precise carriage gave the impression that he had been a soldier; and that he was by birth an Irishman seemed equally evident.

The dark-eyed man had been playing a desperate game, and, as fortune seemed to smile on him, he had won a goodly amount of "chips," being now some three thousand dollars ahead of the "bank."

His companion's play had not resulted in gains, and after seeing the "tiger" gather in some twenty-odd dollars of his money, the Irishman stopped playing and contented himself with watching his companion's game.

The proprietor of the club-house, the veteran sport, Pete Weekly—the man who bore the reputation of running a square game—

stood in a corner of the room, leaning on a chair, watching the play going on at the faro-table.

Up to the proprietor sauntered a well-dressed man of middle-age, with an iron-gray beard, and hair of the same hue.

This person, well known from one end of the country to the other, was the famous journalist, Edward Bertram, who, under his pen-name of "Manhattan," had achieved a wonderful reputation.

"You are just the man I want to see!" Weekly exclaimed, as the journalist approached and greeted him.

"I am glad I came, then."

"You know something about almost everybody, so tell me who are those two men at the faro-table, the white-faced, dark-eyed fellow, who seems inclined to go in and break the bank to-night, and his red-whiskered friend, who is aiding and abetting him with his counsel?"

"Is it possible, Peter, that you don't know your guests?" the journalist asked, with a quizzical air.

"Oh, they are all right, of course—gentlemen who know how to behave themselves, or else they would never have been introduced into my saloon; but, can't you give me some of the inside facts about them?"

"Ah, yes; I see. You are inclined to take an interest in the man who, if his luck holds, will certainly break your bank before he gets through to-night!" the journalist responded.

"You did well to put in, if his luck holds, for these little *ifs* play the deuce with a man's calculations sometimes," the gambler observed, dryly.

"My dear Peter, you have applied to the right shop for information in regard to those two gentlemen," the journalist now added, assuringly; "for, as it happens, I know as much about them as anybody does."

"That is lucky! Fire away!"

"The good-looking fellow with the dark hair, white face, and singularly handsome hands, is named Howard Fitz Gerald."

"He is an English-Irishman—that is, he is English by birth, but comes of the good old Irish family, the Fitz Gerald, although his ancestors have been domiciled in England for years."

"Oh, yes; I have heard of the Fitz Gerald," the gambler acknowledged; "I remember reading about one of them, in the old time, who was nicknamed 'Silken Thomas,' and who headed a rebellion against England."

"Exactly! Well, this gentleman claims to be a direct descendant of that Silken Thomas, I believe. He is not a man of large wealth, I understand, for the great Fitz Gerald money didn't come to his branch of the family."

"But he has a fair amount of property, and has come over to make a tour of America, just to see for himself what kind of a 'blasted country' this is, anyway, 'don't-cher-know.'"

"Something of a high-roller, I should judge, from the ferocious way in which he has tackled my bank to-night."

"Well, he seems to be a quiet, decent fellow enough, and has made a good impression on the people with whom he has become acquainted."

"He brought letters of introduction to a half dozen New Yorkers, and as a couple of them happened to belong to the swell set, who claim to be of the choice 400, the leaders of metropolitan society, he has been introduced to a lot of good people—in fact, has been quite a lion."

"So you see, my dear Weekly, being a lion, I don't doubt that he has got it into his head that he can get away with the 'tiger.'"

"Well, one thing is certain: whether he is a high-roller or not, he knows a thing or two about a faro-table, for he is playing as scientific a game as I ever saw," the old sport declared.

"Is that possible?" the newspaper man asked.

"Yes, he is not a novice at cards, and that is the reason why I asked you about him, for he is playing a game that even the oldest professional might envy."

"Well, your opinion goes, for what you don't know about these little games is not worth knowing."

"He is playing a particularly shrewd and careful game, calculating closely the run of

the cards, and then, too, luck is running his way, and that has a deal to do with it, I can tell you!"

"Yes, I should suppose so, though, really, Peter, for a man of my age, who has seen as much of life as I have, I am very innocent about all these games, for I never was tempted to risk any money in that way."

"Well, it is like everything else; a man has got to understand the principles of the game or he will not have any show for his money," the veteran explained.

"Once in a while, of course, a man will tumble into a streak of dumb, fool luck, and succeed in filling his pockets no matter how badly he plays."

"But who is the red-whiskered fellow?"

"He is named McCracken, Captain Bernard McCracken, an Irishman, as you might surmise by his name—a soldier of fortune who has fought under about as many flags as he has fingers and toes, if his stories are to be believed."

"A sort of an adventurer, eh?"

"Well, yes, something of the kind, but I don't know as there is anything particularly bad about him. He certainly is a jolly fellow, good-natured, witty, and a most agreeable companion, apparently has been all over the world, and therefore has seen a great deal of life."

"But, how does the man live?" asked the practical, hard-headed Weekly.

"He says that he has a small estate in Ireland which gives him enough for his modest wants. There is nothing of the braggart about the man, although he does tell some pretty tough stories of adventures in foreign lands. Then, too, he is an inveterate billiard-player and usually wins at the cue when he plays for money."

CHAPTER II.

THE WIFE OF THE BANKER.

THE old sport reflected over the matter for a moment, attentively studying the faces of the men at the faro-table.

"Something of a shark, eh?" he observed, at last.

"Well, it is hardly fair to characterize him in *that* way, for he doesn't go around seeking whom he may devour," the journalist replied, "but he has got in with a set of high rollers since he came to New York—men who have an extremely good opinion of their own abilities in certain lines; and as they are always prepared to back that opinion with their money, I don't doubt that the captain manages to pick up an easy hundred dollars a week by showing these would-be billiard experts that they do not know quite as much about the game as they think they do."

"He seems to be on very friendly terms with the Englishman," the old gambler suggested.

"Yes; they met for the first time, I understand, on the steamer which brought them to this country. Fitz Gerald was going to make a tour of the United States, while the captain, having heard in Europe that these little petty South American powers were on the eve of a general war, was on his way to offer the use of his sword to one of them; but as he and the Englishman took a liking to each other on board of the ship, he concluded to remain for a while with Fitz Gerald in New York."

"A sort of lion and jackal arrangement," the sport intimated.

"You are sarcastic!"

"Well, I may be mistaken in my estimate of this Englishman," was Weekly's reply, "but it is my opinion that, although he may be a scion of the English nobility, he is nevertheless a man who has had a deal of experience on the green cloth; so if you had asked me who he was, and I had given you my ideas about him, I most surely would have said that he was a skilled sport who had come in here with a 'system' prepared to break my bank."

The newspaper man laughed.

"Oh, I don't doubt but the man is just what he represents himself to be," Bertram replied.

"You must bear in mind that there is a deal more betting and gambling in Europe than in this country; that is, I mean, in private, among people who really amount to something."

"Remember the Prince of Wales's exposure. He and his associates were so fond of staking, that they actually carried a gambling-table around with them to the different country houses where they visited, so that they could play the game in a proper manner."

"Yes, I know all about that—I know that many of these well bred Englishmen are fond of games of chance, although they are about the same as Americans in risking their money at public gaming tables, such as mine, for instance; they gamble a great deal in private, while it is a regular thing, there, for the majority of the young men of good position to have their betting-books on the races just as often as the spring and the racing season comes around."

"That's true, and so I am not surprised at the desperate attack which Fitz Gerald is making on your bank to-night."

"He may be all right, but I have my doubts," the veteran averred.

By this time the winnings of the Englishman had swelled to over five thousand dollars, and, attracted by his good fortune, quite a number of people had gathered in the vicinity of the faro-table, eager to watch the struggle.

As the gamblers say—"things were coming the Englishman's way" on this occasion.

Another lucky play increased Fitz Gerald's gain by a thousand dollars.

The Irishman began to get a little nervous.

"Arrah! Fitz Gerald, me jewel, hadn't ye better l'ave off playing now while ye are so much ahead of the game?" he whispered in the ear of the Englishman. "Such a run of luck can't last forever, you know."

"Ye have had the devil's own strake of fortune, and hadn't ye better cash in your checks and get out before the tide turns?"

"Wait until I make it ten thousand, Barney, and then I will stop," Fitz Gerald replied.

"It is all right, of course, for ye to try for the tin, but your luck may turn, and if I were you I would be content to get away with what ye have got."

"No! no! Ten thousand is my limit!" the Englishman insisted, obstinately.

And then he began to bet again.

But, just what the Irishman anticipated occurred.

The Englishman's luck did turn, and within an hour he had lost his last chip.

He played with the utmost sangfroid, though, and did not seem to care whether he lost or won, but when his last ivory piece disappeared he shook his head and exclaimed:

"There, I think I have had amusement enough for one night, and I will give it up!"

"Ye have had a foine time of it!" the Irishman remarked. "And there isn't anything in the world aqual to a little game of this kind to kape a man's blood stirring in his veins."

Then the two friends helped themselves to a generous glass of brandy and departed, much to the relief of the proprietor of the gaming-place.

"It is all right," he observed to the journalist. "He may be an English lordling, and possibly he does only play just for amusement—to pass the hours away; but the only time I have ever had my bank bu'sted and been compelled to shut up shop, was when a man of this sort, who knew the game so thoroughly as to be able to work out an elaborate system, sat down at my table and proceeded to give me the worst kind of a razzle-dazzle!"

We will follow the footsteps of the two companions.

They had helped themselves to the choice cigars which the club-house proprietor provided for the use of his guests, and, lighting them as they emerged into the open air, strolled leisurely to the great street of the summer city, the far-famed Ocean avenue.

"Aha, Howard, me jewel, ye made a big mistake that ye didn't give up playing when I advised ye to!" the Irishman reminded, with a wise shake of the head.

"Yes, I would be five or six thousand dollars ahead of the game," the other rejoined, indifferently, as though he cared little for the money.

"And if I am not wrong, you have lost to-night about all the money you had."

"Correct! I've only got about fifty left,"

and the Englishman smiled as though he considered it a good joke.

"Wow, wow!" cried the captain. "Howard, me jewel, that is a bad outlook!"

"Deuced bad!"

"Why didn't ye stop when ye had the money, thin?"

"Why didn't I? Because I was a donkey, and not content to let well enough alone!" the other exclaimed, for the first time betraying signs of anger; "but the cards were running so well that I thought I was safe to get the ten thousand; but, just as it looked as if I would surely succeed, luck turned against me, and I couldn't win a stake."

"It is mighty bad, and no mistake!"

"Yes; for we are in a bad way at present, for our money is about gone, and I don't see any opportunity to make a strike."

"I was in hopes that you would be afther picking up some of these Yankee gurls wid a big lot of money," hinted the captain.

"Yes; from what I had heard of the country and the people I didn't think there would be any trouble in working a game of that kind, but so far I have not succeeded in coming across the right party—one with money enough to make it worth while."

The captain expressed his regret, and here the conversation was brought to an end by the pair overtaking a couple of their New York acquaintances who were on their way to the West End Hotel to take a look at the "hop" which was given there on this particular evening.

In due time the four arrived at the hotel, which was where the Englishman and the captain had secured rooms.

The companions joined the loungers who were watching the dancers.

Suddenly the attention of Fitz Gerald was attracted to a handsomely dressed blonde beauty, a woman of twenty-five or thereabouts, apparently, who, in addition to wearing about the costliest apparel in the ball-room, and astonishing the rest of the women by the display of her diamonds, was by long odds the best dancer in the room.

"Hello! there is a new-comer!" the Englishman said to the captain, directing his attention to the woman.

"I must know who she is. Find out for me, captain, there is a good fellow!"

McCracken proceeded immediately to comply with the request.

He rather wondered at it, but asked no questions, for he knew that his companion usually had a good reason for his actions.

As the journalist had said—the captain was a jolly good fellow, who always managed to make plenty of friends wherever he went, and during his stay at the hotel he had succeeded in getting on good terms with almost everybody with whom he came in contact; so, when he met one of the hotel clerks gazing at the dancers from the main doorway of the ballroom, he had no difficulty in getting the information which he sought.

"That lady is Mrs. General Godfrey Hubberton, the wife of the great Wall street banker," McCracken explained when he returned.

"Aha! I am in luck then to-night!" Fitz Gerald cried.

CHAPTER III.

A MOONLIGHT MEETING.

"Do you know her?" the Irishman asked.

"Oh, yes; she is from across the water—a French-English girl."

"Her mother was a Londoner and her father a scion of one of the noblest families in France, so the girl has good blood in her veins, and it isn't any wonder that she appears like a queen among these other women."

"She certainly is handsome, possesses a very distinguished air, too, and carries herself with the grace of one who has always been used to the best society," the captain observed with the manner of a man who well knew what good society was.

"Oh, she can hold her own with the best of them!" Fitz Gerald assured, "and what is in her favor, too, is, that she is the best-dressed woman in the room, while her diamonds are simply superb."

"And, why shouldn't she be well dressed?" McCracken asked. "Isn't she the wife of a man worth three or four millions of dollars? Isn't Hubberton one of the big money-kings of New York?"

"I don't know anything about the man personally, for I never happened to meet him, but I have read all abo it him dozens of times in the newspapers."

"Yes, he is undoubtedly a great man in his line, and Miss Angelina certainly made a capital match when she secured him."

"By the way, did you find out where she was stopping?"

"Yes; got all the information I could," McCracken replied. "The general, her husband, has taken one of the most expensive furnished cottages on the avenue—the fourth one below here, with an ocean frontage."

"I know the place. Is the general here, by the way?" Fitz Gerald asked, thoughtfully.

"No, he doesn't come until to-morrow," McCracken answered.

"To-morrow, eh? Then it will be wise for me to have an interview with her to-night so that we will know exactly how we stand. But, that may be a somewhat difficult matter to arrange. It will depend upon her, though, for unless she is unwilling to see me she can easily get an opportunity if I give her the chance."

"By the way, captain, be very cautious about this matter," the Englishman warned.

"Not a word to anybody that I know aught of the lady until she and I arrange the story to give to the world."

"My dear fellow, you ought to know well enough that I am never a talker!"

"We'll saunter into the ball-room, so I will have a chance to catch her eye," the Englishman suggested.

As the pair entered, the dance had just ended, and Mrs. General Hubberton was being escorted, by her partner, to a seat near the door, where, as the gentleman explained to the lady, there was a chance of getting more fresh air than anywhere else in the big room.

As the lady seated herself, her eyes fell upon Fitz Gerald's face.

The Englishman was gazing at her as a stranger might gaze who admired her appearance, but as one who had never before seen her.

A shade immediately appeared on the handsome features of the lady, and she seemed ill at ease.

"It is very warm!" she declared, to her escort, who stood with his back to Fitz Gerald, so that he was not conscious of the Englishman's presence.

At the words she fanned herself, and gazed at Fitz Gerald with a peculiar look in her large blue eyes.

The companions were standing so near that, if they spoke in an ordinary tone, the lady could distinctly hear what was said.

Fitz Gerald took advantage of the fact.

"I am going to take a stroll down the beach to enjoy a quiet smoke for the next hour or so," he said, addressing his conversation to the Irishman.

"I will not be over two or three minutes' walk away; so, if you happen to meet any old friend from across the water who would like to have a chat with me, you can tell them where I have gone. I will be glad to see them."

The Irishman nodded, and then the two moved away.

The escort of Mrs. Hubberton of course overheard the remark as well as the lady, and, naturally, turned his head to see who it was that had spoken, although he attached no importance to the conversation.

He did not see the change in the expression of the lady's face, or notice that she was striving to conceal her features behind her fan.

But the woman evidently was alarmed, for she turned pale, and then flushed red to her temples as she glanced after the retreating couple, and the hand which held the fan trembled.

In a moment, though, she recovered her composure, and when her companion turned his gaze upon her again, she only appeared slightly flushed.

She explained this by protesting again that the room was very warm.

"Really it is too much like work to dance in such an atmosphere," she remarked, "so I think I will go home. May I trouble you to escort me to the dressing-room and have one of the servants call my carriage?"

The gentleman, of course, was happy to

carry out her wishes, although he was in despair at being deprived of her delightful company.

Mrs. Hubberton's maid was in the dressing-room waiting for her mistress, and in five minutes more she was in her own home.

She had the girl remove her evening-dress; saw that the costly jewelry was securely locked in the little safe, which, in the disguise of a bric-a-brac cabinet, stood in a corner of her apartment.

She put on a comfortable, dark house-wrapper and dismissed the maid, saying:

"You can go to bed, Clara, as soon as you like, for I shall not need you again to-night. I have a new novel, and as I do not feel sleepy I shall probably read for a couple of hours."

The girl thanked the lady and departed.

Mrs. Hubberton waited for about ten minutes; then drawing on a mackintosh, which was a plain black on one side, she stole quietly down the front stairs.

The servants always used the back stairs, so she was not likely to encounter any of them.

She passed out of the front door, went down the steps, and then across the lawn until she gained the shelter of the evergreen hedge which separated the grounds of her cottage from the adjoining one.

The moon, half-way to its full, shone radiantly, but when she reached the shade of the hedge she was sheltered from observation.

The evergreens led from the street to the edge of the bluff, beneath which was the beach and the ever-restless waters of the sea.

A flight of steps led from the summit of the bluff down to the beach where there were bathing boxes and a summer-house.

Mrs. Hubberton reached the edge of the bluff to discover that a man was seated in the summer-house, and she could plainly distinguish the lighted end of his cigar.

"It is he, and he waits for me!" she murmured as she descended the steps.

She had not made a mistake. It was Fitz Gerald who sat in the summer-house.

He rose and bowed politely as Mrs. Hubberton entered.

She returned his salutation coldly, her face very pale and her eyes blazing.

"What is it to be—peace or war?" she demanded, her voice hoarse and unnatural, evidently laboring under deep excitement.

"My dear Angelina, that is to be exactly as you shall decide," Fitz Gerald replied in his smoothest tone, and with a low bow; "but I will say, right at the beginning, that, if it depends upon me, it will be peace decidedly."

"You ought to know that I am the last man in the world to make war upon a woman, if I am allowed any choice in the matter."

"Yes, I must admit that you always treated me courteously, and I have nothing to complain of in that regard."

"As I was in the past so shall you find me in the present and the future!" the Englishman declared with another polite bow.

"But, be seated, so we can converse at leisure. This is a charming place for a tete-a-tete; and at such an hour as this we are not likely to be disturbed. It is certain that no one can play the eavesdropper upon us."

The lady sunk upon one of the seats, and the Englishman took a seat by her side.

"You were amazed to see me to-night," he remarked. "Not only amazed but alarmed, too."

"Yes, I will not deny but that is the truth, yet I have been looking forward to such a meeting for some time, for I had an apprehension that it would come, some day."

"You ought not to fear me. Did I not always treat you well?"

"Oh, yes."

"And when we parted—forced to part by the decrees of fate, did we not agree that in the future we would always remember our old friendship and aid each other to the best of our ability?"

"Yes, we did."

"Why, then, be alarmed at the sight of me?"

"Ah, well, my position has so changed."

"Oh, yes, and greatly for the better. You are now the wife of a man worth four or five

millions, so they say, one of these wonderful American money-kings."

"Yes, he is a rich man, and if you choose you could make a great deal of trouble for me," the woman said, in an anxious tone.

"Well, but I will not choose, unless you force me to do so by behaving in an ugly and ungrateful manner."

"Ah, yes, I supposed you would ask me for money, and that is just what I was afraid of when I first saw you."

"Afraid?" asked the Englishman in a tone of wonder. "Why, you surely don't suppose that I am going to be so mean as to worry the life out of you for a little bit of filthy lucre?"

"I will not deny that I am not overburdened with cash," he continued. "It was my idea that I could make a good thing out of these Yankees, but so far I have not succeeded in doing so."

"You do want money then?"

"Yes, I do, indeed."

"And, I suppose you think all you have to do is to ask for what you want, and that I will be compelled to give it to you," the woman exclaimed with trembling lips.

"Don't give way to alarm!" the Englishman urged, impatiently. "I am not going to hound you."

"Of course, in the event of your refusing to help me I could be very disagreeable, if I wanted to be, but I do not believe there will be any necessity for me to act ugly about the matter."

"I have faith enough in you to believe that you will do all you can for me in reason, and I assure you that I do not intend to be unreasonable, so there is no occasion for you to frighten yourself to death."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Hubberton observed, slowly; "I suppose I am foolish; but, when I caught sight of your face to-night, it struck a deadly chill to my heart, for I know that I am completely in your power, and that you can hurl me to utter ruin if you choose to be cruel."

"Yes, but I am not going to be cruel!" Fitz Gerald persisted. "You never found me so in the old time, and I am not going to be so now."

"I cannot do much for you, so if you want a large sum I cannot get it," Mrs. Hubberton informed him.

"That is strange, when your husband is so wealthy."

"Yes, but he is very close about money matters. He allows me fifty dollars a week for pin-money only, and if I want new dresses, jewelry, or anything of the sort, I must give him a full account; then he gets the things. I will do him the justice to say that he rarely refuses, but he will not allow me to run up any bills."

"Then it would not be an easy matter for you to get five hundred or a thousand dollar to use as you liked without giving an account of the expenditure to him?" the Englishman queried.

"No; it would be an impossibility unless I absolutely stole the money from him, and there is very little chance of my being able to do that without running a great risk of being caught."

"That is a desperate game to play, and I would not advise such a course unless circumstances were unusually favorable," the Englishman averred. "You have succeeded in getting a good position, and would be foolish to jeopardize it by any rash act."

"As it happens, I am much in want of money just now, but am not going to ask you to risk the ruin of your prospects to help me."

"You have taken a weight from my mind!" the woman declared, with a sigh of relief.

"I have only been in this country for a couple of weeks, and it was my idea that I would be able to pick up one of these rich Yankee heiresses," the Englishman explained.

"Well, you ought to be able to do that, for there are plenty of rich girls who are just crazy to marry Englishmen of good families, and do not seem to care whether the bridegroom is rich or poor, good or ill looking, nor to care a particle as to his morals and habits."

"That was the impression I had, but, so far, I have not succeeded in making the acquaintance of any girl who appeared to be

at all desirable. I am perhaps a little too much in a hurry, for I have not been here long enough to make many acquaintances."

"I think I have the very girl for you!" Mrs. Hubberton avowed, abruptly.

"That is good!"

"My husband's daughter by his first wife—Magdalene Hubberton."

"Ah! Right in the family, eh?"

"Yes. She is not a beauty, although not absolutely ugly, and from her mother, who was a rich woman, she inherited half a million dollars in her own exclusive right."

"Aha! a half-million beauties will amply make up for a few imperfections in face and form," was the adventurer's ready assent.

"She is a very peculiar girl, and at first she was bitter toward me, for she did not like the idea of her father marrying at all."

"That was natural, of course. You did not move in the charmed circle of society in which she had an orbit; but even if you had, she would probably have looked upon an Englishman in the light of an intruder."

"Yes; she and her father had a battle royal, for my husband is an obstinate, dogmatic man, who has been accustomed to having things his own way, and was not inclined to submit to any dictation in such a matter."

"Of course not!"

"He simply told his daughter that he married to please himself and nobody else, and if she didn't like his marriage, she was not obliged to live in the house with him."

"That was particularly to the point!"

"She sulked for awhile, but, as the marriage was an accomplished fact, which neither she nor anybody else could alter, she finally concluded not to quarrel with her father about it."

"A wise decision."

At this point a burst of laughter startled the conspiring couple.

A half-dozen young men, evidently under the influence of liquor, were coming along the beach.

"I must go, for I may be recognized!" Mrs. Hubberton cried. "Contrive to get an introduction to me, and then at our leisure we can converse on the subject!"

Then she fled in haste up the steps.

CHAPTER IV.

HUNTED DOWN.

THE Morning Express on the New York Central Railroad, due in the metropolis at nine o'clock, had stopped for breakfast at Poughkeepsie.

Among the other passengers who came from the train was a tall, well-built gentleman, rather good-looking, although his features were somewhat coarse, with glossy, jet-black hair and a luxuriant mustache of the same hue.

He was elegantly dressed, but walked with something of a swagger, and a good judge of human nature would have taken him to belong to that numerous class of humans who exist by preying upon their fellows.

There are wolves and vultures in the guise of humanity who are just as savage and remorseless as the beasts and birds of prey.

The man had been sitting in the seat with a neatly-dressed young lady; who, although she could not be called handsome, yet had a pleasant and agreeable face.

She was rather an odd looking girl in some respects, for she had gray-blue eyes, as keen and searching in their gaze as the orbs of a hawk, light brown hair, arranged with exquisite taste in the prevailing fashion; her complexion was rather sallow, and her upper lip was marked with a faint line of down like the budding mustache of a seventeen-year-old boy.

This gave the young woman a masculine look. Then, too, her features were strong and irregular, the cheek-bones being prominent, and the square, resolute chin gave indication that she possessed a strong will.

As the well-dressed person we have described descended from the car, the lady watched him from the window until he was lost to sight amid the crowd in the refreshment-room.

Then she turned her attention to the front door of the car as though she expected someone.

In five minutes her impatience found vent in words.

"Can it be that he didn't get my telegram?" she asked herself.

"Well, if he don't come I will do the trick myself, although I don't doubt that it will be a tough job."

At the moment, however, through the car-door came a resolute-looking, neatly-dressed man, at whose appearance the face of the girl lighted up, and as he approached, she made a rapid sign to him.

"Ah, you are here?" he said, in a low tone.

"Yes, and the bird has gone to get a cup of coffee. You must nail him when he comes back, but don't give him a chance to make a fight, for I feel sure he is a desperate fellow."

"All right!"

Then the stranger went on to the rear platform, and there waited and watched until the well-dressed, black-haired fellow boarded the car and took his seat by the side of the lady.

At this the man outside slowly sauntered into the car, came along until he was right at the seat where the pair sat; then, whipping out a revolver he leveled it at the head of the passenger, exclaiming as he did so.

"You are my prisoner!"

There was a tableau of astonishment.

CHAPTER V.

A DESPERATE DEED.

UNDER the circumstances it was not strange that the passengers were amazed.

The lady started up as though terribly alarmed, while the man glared at the muscular fellow with the revolver, with a countenance inflamed with anger.

"What the deuce do you mean, sir? Are you crazy?" he fiercely demanded.

"Oh, no; I am in perfect possession of my senses, thank you," the man with the revolver assured. "I am a detective officer, and have a warrant for your arrest."

A shade passed quickly across the face of the other; it was evident that he was most disagreeably surprised.

For a moment only; then he leaned back in his seat and, forcing a smile, shook his head.

"This is some inexcusable blunder!" he exclaimed, "for there is no reason why I should be arrested. You certainly have mistaken your man."

"No, I think not," the detective responded. "I have here the warrant for your arrest," and with his left hand he drew a legal-looking document from his pocket.

"Oh, I don't doubt that you think you are correct, but I assure you, my dear sir, that you have made a mistake."

Then he unfolded the warrant and took a look at it.

"You take me to be the Marmaduke Armitage called for in this paper?" he asked, after he had read the warrant.

"Yes, sir, I do."

"You are mistaken, sir, as I supposed, and as I told you in the beginning. My name is Johnson—Robert L. Johnson, and I am a resident of Chicago," he protested.

"Of course, sir, it may be possible that I have made a mistake, but I don't think I have," the detective returned. "Still, I am really not the party who is engineering this bit of work, but am acting under orders."

"Excuse me. I may be dull of comprehension, and I presume I am, for I do not understand this matter at all," the passenger remarked with a look of amazement on his features.

"Do I understand you to say that you have been directed to arrest me by some one else?"

"Yes, sir; that is correct."

"It is astonishing!" the man asseverated. "I do not understand it! I do not see how such a mistake could be made."

"I do not really know, sir," the detective protested; "but if a mistake has been made, I can give you no explanation. My orders are to arrest and bring you before the superintendent of police; then, if you can prove to his satisfaction that you are not the man who is wanted, you will undoubtedly be discharged at once."

"Ah, yes; but this is very disagreeable!" the passenger declared.

"Of course it is; but under the circum-

stances it cannot be avoided. My orders are plain, and I must carry them out."

"Yes, yes, I presume so. You really haven't any discretion in the matter," the passenger seemed to assent, as he folded up the warrant and returned it to the detective.

"No sir; none at all. In a case of this kind, all I can do is to execute orders."

And the detective, putting the warrant in his pocket, produced a pair of handcuffs, at which an expression of deep chagrin appeared on the face of the accused man.

"Oh, come; I say, you are surely not going to put those things on me!" he exclaimed.

"I regret, sir, that I am obliged to do so," the detective replied in a civil, but decidedly firm tone.

"But, my dear fellow, I am not the kind of man to attempt to run away, you know," the passenger assured, "and under present circumstances I fancy I would have an exceedingly difficult job to get away from you," he continued, with a smile.

"It would be as much as a man's life is worth to get off this train while it is running at its present rate of speed."

"Very true, sir. Not much danger that you will attempt to escape, but I have got to put on the bracelets just the same as if there was a chance for you to give me the slip," the detective persisted.

And had the passenger known the gentleman, he would have understood that he was merely wasting time in talking about the matter, for the detective was no other than Tony Western, one of the best of all the New York thief-catchers—the right-hand man of the celebrated Joe Phenix, the champion man-hunter of Gotham.

"Oh, of course, I don't blame you for carrying out your instructions," the other remarked.

"I presume that, like a soldier, when orders are given, you have no discretion in the matter."

"Not in a case of this kind," the detective replied. "For it is my duty, after I have secured my prisoner, to take all possible precaution that he does not escape."

"Yes, yes, of course, you are right," the accused man assented.

"It is an extremely disagreeable experience for me, but as under the circumstances I can't help myself, I am obliged to submit, and I will do it with as good a grace as possible, although I am going to be placed in an extremely humiliating position."

"Well, these little things will happen once in a while," the detective observed, with the air of a philosopher, as the passenger held out his hands and he proceeded to snap the handcuffs upon his wrists.

"It will be only a temporary inconvenience," the passenger observed, with an air of resignation. "For as soon as I get a chance to explain the matter to the superintendent of police, I can speedily show him that an extremely stupid mistake has been made."

"I will take you before the superintendent as soon as we arrive in the city," Tony Western remarked.

"So you will not be kept long in suspense."

"I will be much obliged," the prisoner replied.

"Do you smoke, officer?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you don't mind coming to the smoker with me we will enjoy a weed."

"Certainly, I shall be pleased," the detective responded.

Then the prisoner addressed the young lady who occupied the other portion of the seat, and who had surveyed the strange proceedings with apparent astonishment.

"You will have the kindness to excuse me, Miss Moravia, but be under no apprehension, for I assure you it is all a stupid mistake, and that as soon as I get an opportunity to explain matters to the superintendent of police I will be immediately set free."

"Oh, yes, sir, of course; I know it must be a mistake," the girl replied in the most innocent manner possible.

"When you reach the city you ought to follow the course which I advised; then you will not have any trouble," the prisoner remarked.

"Yes, sir, and I am very much obliged to you for your kindness."

"Don't mention it, I beg!"

Then he bowed politely to the girl, rose from his seat, and started toward the forward door, the detective following close at his heels.

The prisoner passed through the door to the platform and then, turning suddenly, said:

"I left my handkerchief on the seat; will you allow me to return and get it?"

"Certainly!" Western replied, moving to one side so that the man could pass him.

But, for once in his life the acute detective had been caught napping. As he turned sideways to allow the other to pass, the prisoner, with his manacled hands, dealt him a powerful blow under the ear, where he dropped down in a heap in the passageway.

This was apparently sheer madness, but there was a deal of method in it, for at this time the train was running over one of the many bridges which span the coves of the Hudson, and cross the tributary streams flowing into the main river.

The train was on the outside track, and it was but a step from the car-platform into the river. The prisoner, noting this fact, had suddenly conceived the idea that it might be possible for him to escape, and so made the attack on the detective.

Following his blow, the desperate man without hesitation leaped from the car-platform into the water!

He knew how to make the leap, too, for he dove head-foremost in the direction that the train was going, and, as the engine had slackened speed over the trestle, he turned a single somersault and went into the water feet foremost!

A shout followed from the amazed passengers, all of whom had sprung to their feet, astounded by this strange occurrence.

All were, of course, intensely excited, for few who had seen the leap but what believed the man had wantonly chosen to take his own life, for they did not think it possible he could escape death.

CHAPTER VI.

A METAMORPHOSIS.

IN a moment Tony Western was on his feet—enraged and disgusted with himself that the cool *sangfroid* of the prisoner had so deceived him.

Under the circumstances there was only one thing to be done: the train must be stopped and an attempt made to recapture the fugitive.

Handcuffed as the fellow was, the chances were that he might drown before he could make the shore.

But, just as Tony was about to grab the bell-rope, the conductor made his appearance and promptly seized the detective's hand.

"Come! come! none of that, you know, unless you are anxious to find yourself in the hands of the law," the conductor warned.

"I want to stop the train!" the sleuthhound explained.

"Exactly! I know you do, and that is just what you mustn't do, you know!" the conductor retorted.

"But it must be done! I am a detective officer, and a prisoner whom I just captured has leaped from the train into the river," Western explained.

"You don't mean it?" cried the conductor, in amazement.

"It is a fact, and he was handcuffed, too!"

"And he went into the river?"

"Yes—leaped from the platform."

"Poor devil! The chances are that he will be drowned!"

"If the man can swim, he will probably reach the shore, even if he hasn't got the use of his hands. But come! stop the train so that I can go after him!"

"My dear fellow, I am sorry, but I don't think I can do anything of that sort, you know," the conductor replied, "because this is the Through Express and not scheduled to stop between Poughkeepsie and New York."

"We are behind time, too—nearly half an hour late, which we must make up if no accident happens. If I stop here, it will delay us just that much more."

"Yes, but I will lose my man!" Tony Western expostulated.

"Oh, no; you can take the first train out, and can easily get on his track again. A train leaves in twenty minutes after we get in—an Accommodation, too, and stops at the station nearest to the trestle-bridge."

"Why, that will give the man two or three hours' start!" Tony Western exclaimed in disgust.

"Yes, he will get something of a start—no mistake about that," the conductor assented.

"But from the fact of his having handcuffs on, it will be an easy matter for you to trace him," the official continued. "It will not be a soft job for him to get rid of the manacles, you know."

"Well, I am not so sure about that," the detective replied. "Judging from this little episode this man is an uncommonly accomplished scoundrel, and if he succeeds in getting three hours' start, the chances are good that he will contrive to cover his tracks so that it will be an extremely difficult matter to get on his trail."

"My dear sir, I would be delighted to oblige you by stopping the train if I could, but I know that if I did I would get in trouble with my superiors, for they pride themselves upon this train making time, and a stoppage might cost me my position."

"Of course, it is all my own fault, I ought not to have permitted the man to get away from me," the detective observed ruefully.

"I admit that he caught me napping, for I had no suspicion that he was the kind of man to try such a desperate trick."

"Did you want the man for a capital crime—murder, or anything of the kind?" the conductor asked, evidently wavering in his mind as to whether he had better oblige the detective or not.

"No; merely a thief on a large scale—got away with a large amount of Express money," the detective explained.

"Ah, well; it isn't so bad then. These big Express companies have money enough, so they can stand it," the conductor remarked with a laugh.

Then he went on about his business, and Tony Western helped himself to a seat, where he remained, very much disgusted with the way things had gone, until the train entered the Grand Central Depot in the City of New York.

The young woman, whom the prisoner had addressed as Miss Moravia, took no notice of the moody detective during the journey, but, after the cars arrived in the depot, and she, with the rest of the passengers, left the train, she timed her movements so that she followed right on the detective's heels, and, as the throng passed through the door into the street she spoke, almost in his ear:

"Wait for me! I will be back in the Central Railway waiting-room in ten minutes!"

"All right," replied the detective in a low voice, not turning his head or taking any notice of the girl.

The young woman hurried across the street to the hotel and took a room. She had a good-sized hand-bag with her, and, as this hotel got the greater part of its trade from travelers coming from the depot, she was speedily accommodated with a good apartment without any questions being asked, as the experienced clerk saw at a glance that she was a respectable person.

But if the clerk could have seen the transformation which took place in the girl's appearance within a minute or so after she entered the apartment, he would have changed his mind in regard to her being a desirable guest for a first-class hotel.

Locking the door in haste, she opened the hand bag, from which she produced a neatly-folded loose sack coat and a soft Alpine hat, both black in color, a man's turned down collar and a four-in-hand scarf.

Then she removed both her hat and her hair, which was a magnificently made wig!

The removal of the wig revealed her own short locks, golden yellow in color, and which curled in little crispy ringlets all over her head.

Next off came her little light jacket; the dress followed, and underneath she had on a full man's suit, less the coat, collar and necktie.

The legs of the pantaloons were rolled well up around the calves of her legs, and pinned

to keep them in place, so that if she had had occasion to lift the dress in crossing the street only the black stockings would be seen.

Her shoes were a stout, rather clumsy pair for a woman to wear, but when the pantaloons legs were unpinned and turned down, the shoes appeared to be all right.

Into the apartment had come a rather masculine-looking girl.

In five minutes, out of the room went a young fellow of twenty-one or two, a little effeminate in his appearance, but if a close observer had thought well to take a second glance at him, saying, "Hello! you look deuced like a woman dressed up in man's clothes!" yet the second gaze would have shown the critic that the budding mustache of manhood was beginning to shade the upper lip, and then his suspicion would undoubtedly have vanished.

Before leaving the room, the woman—or man, whichever it was—a conundrum which the reader must solve for himself—took care to lock all the articles of dress, which had been discarded, in the hand-bag, so that no prying servant's curiosity could be excited.

When the youth descended to the first floor, he passed directly into the street, carrying the key of the room with him.

No one paid any attention to him, for there were dozens of transient customers during the day, and it would have been a wonderfully smart clerk who could have kept track of all of them.

In the waiting-room of the Central Railway the youth found Tony Western.

He had procured a time-card of the Central Road and was industriously studying it.

"Here I am!" the youth declared, taking a seat by the side of the detective.

Tony surveyed the speaker for a moment before he replied, and then he exclaimed:

"Well, this is a most wonderful metamorphosis!"

"Pretty good get-up, eh?"

"Yes, I should say so."

"A lightning-quick change!" the youth declared, with a laugh.

"You bet your life! Why, you have hardly been gone five minutes!"

"About ten, really; but then it must be taken into consideration that I had to get my room, pay for it, and 'chin' the clerk for a few moments, for it would never do to allow any one to think I was in a hurry."

"Well, all I have to say is that you are a credit to the profession, and Joe Phenix made a lucky find when he came across you."

"Very much obliged for your compliments," the youth declared with a polite bow.

"Oh, no compliments—no taffy, you know—only the honest truth!"

"You do me proud!" the youth responded with another bow.

"And I must admit that you have a deuced sight more sense than I have, for you warned me, saying that you thought this Armitage to be a desperate fellow," the detective admitted.

"Yes, I was right, but his trick was a surprise to me; I didn't expect anything so daring as that."

"I'm afraid he is gone, for I doubt if we can strike on his track, with his three hours' start."

"It is rather dubious, but all we can do is to try."

"I am glad you made up your mind to come with me; you are generally lucky, and in our business, as in every other, luck counts for a good deal."

"Yes, as the old saying goes—'It is better to be born lucky than rich.'"

"And there is a deal of truth in it, too," the detective averred.

"I think so, and so does Phenix, and he is a hard-headed, practical man, who doesn't take much stock in notions."

"By the way, he has got one in regard to me, though."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, honest! He says he really believes that I am his mascot and bring him good luck."

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if there was something in that," Western admitted, for the chief has had an unusually good run of luck since you joined his forces."

"Well, I hope it is the truth. It is pleasant to be the bringer of good luck," the youth assumed with a laugh.

"By the way, what is your name now?" Tony Western asked, abruptly.

"Robert Ridley, oh!" the youth sung. "Plain Bob for short; but, there is our train!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISCOVERY.

THE pair procured their tickets and boarded the train.

It was a slow Accommodation, stopping at every station, and it took over two hours to reach the nearest station to the trestle bridge, where the handcuffed prisoner had taken his bold leap into the placid waters of the noble Hudson.

So the companions had plenty of time to converse while *en route*.

"I am not posted in regard to this fellow, and his crime, excepting that he is called Armitage, and managed to get away with the funds of the Express company," Western remarked.

"Mr. Phenix got your telegram, yesterday just as he was about to leave town on some important business," he continued, "so he turned the matter over to me without going into any particular explanations."

"All he said was that the man had robbed the Express company, that I must swear out a warrant, board the train at Poughkeepsie, and, after I got on, to keep my eyes open for you so as to get the 'office' which man to nab."

"It is the old story," the spy remarked—"a money-package containing ten thousand dollars mysteriously disappeared."

"Three men in the office handled it, and one of the three must have taken the money."

"The company kept the matter quiet, for they were not so particularly anxious to recover the money as they were to catch the thief, it being the rule of the company that no mercy must ever be shown a man who violated their confidence."

"I understand; they don't believe in compromising a thing of that kind."

"And as the local men couldn't do anything, they wrote to Mr. Phenix to take charge of the case and he sent me, not being able to get away himself."

"I must admit that, when I presented myself to the Express men and revealed my business—I was dressed as I am now—they didn't seem to be particularly impressed by my appearance," the effeminate youth remarked, with a smile. "It was plain they were disappointed—that I didn't answer to their expectations of a sleuth-hound."

"But as I had the letter of introduction from Mr. Phenix, they condescended to explain the particulars of the case."

"Then I sized up the three men, and made my report that, in my opinion, this Armitage was more likely to be the thief than the other two, who were just common, hard-working fellows, while I judged, from this man's appearance, that he was inclined to be something of a sport."

"The Express men evidently thought I had made a mistake, but I went in to shadow my man all the same."

"As I expected, he skipped one night for Canada, and I was lucky enough to catch the same train."

"Well, that was fortunate?"

"Yes; but the way the man went to work puzzled me at first. He bought a ticket in the most open manner to Montreal, just as if he wanted to leave a clue behind; but at Toronto he left the train, went to a barber's shop and had his beard removed—he wore a full, short beard in the English fashion."

"This must have made a great change in his appearance."

"Oh, it did, and if I hadn't been on the watch, I think I would have missed him."

"Then his next trick was to drop his Montreal ticket in the street."

"It was an unlimited one, and I presume it was his idea that the man who found it would sell it to some one, who would go on to Montreal with it; then, if the detectives attempted to track the man who had this particular ticket, they would be thrown on a false scent."

"Well, well! That shows this fellow to be a regular artful dodger, for that is about

as cunning a trick as I ever heard of in all my existence."

"As it happened, I was the party who found the ticket," the youth observed, with a low laugh.

"Then his next move was to take a train to a little city called Port Hope, where he took a steamer across the lake to Charlotte, which is only a short distance from the city of Rochester, in New York State, and at Rochester he boarded a train for Gotham."

"About as well-contrived a plan as I ever heard of!" Tony Western avowed.

"He doubled back on his track with the expectation that, if the bloodhounds got after him, they would go chasing up to Montreal."

"Yes, that was his little game, but I succeeded in beating it."

In due time the pair reached their destination, and at once made a careful search for the fugitive, but to no purpose.

"Can it be possible that the man did not reach the shore, and was drowned?" Western asked, as the two specials proceeded to the station, to take the next train for the city.

"I hardly think so, for if the man hadn't been a good swimmer, and confident that he could reach the land, he never would have made that daring dive."

"He might have been stunned by the force of the shock?"

"Very true; but, somehow, I have an idea that he got out all right."

"And if he did, he will be pretty certain to seek me out in New York," the youth continued, "for, you see, I played an awful game on him—came the siren act, you know," with a merry laugh, while she proceeded to explain:

"I watched him get on board the train at Rochester, and then I got on the car, too. The train was well filled, so I had a good excuse to ask if the seat by his side was taken. He willingly made room, and insisted on my taking the seat by the window, as I would be more comfortable."

"Then I did my best to play the part of the innocent country maiden and I gave him a ghost story which caught him at once. I explained that I had fallen heir to a small fortune, about ten thousand dollars I expected, and was on my way to the city to receive it."

"You were, indeed, offering a very attractive bait."

"And I told him that, after I got all ready to start, I had received a letter from the lawyer, who had charge of the affair, that he was called out of the city, and would not return for a week or two, so he would not be able to meet me as had been arranged, but I could either remain at home until he wrote me again, or come on to the city and stop at a hotel until he returned."

"That was to give him an opportunity to offer his advice, eh?"

"Yes; I explained, that as I was all prepared to come, I thought it best to go on, as I had drawn fifty dollars from the bank, so was amply provided with funds."

"Really, you ought to try your hand at writing novels for the story-papers for you certainly do get up a most beautiful yarn."

"Thank you!" the youth responded, smilingly.

"Well, he swallowed the bait greedily enough—pretended to take a great interest in me, because I looked so much like a dear cousin of his—advised me to go the hotel right across the street from the Grand Central Depot; said he always stopped there when he came to New York, and it would give him great pleasure to show me the sights of the city."

"He thought of your ten thousand dollars, eh?"

"Undoubtedly! And if the man did escape a watery death, the chances are he will seek me out, for I am sure I convinced him that I was a simple-hearted country-girl who would believe almost any kind of a tale."

"I think you are correct in this supposition, and although he was smart enough to give me the slip, we may nab him yet."

When the pair arrived in New York the two separated. The youth, proceeding at once to the hotel, again assumed the womanly garb, and then went out for a stroll.

As she went through Forty-second street

toward Broadway, she came upon a sight which caused her to start in surprise.

A private carriage with a coachman in a plain, dark livery stood by the curbstone in front of a fashionable restaurant.

From this restaurant came a young and pretty girl, neatly dressed, escorted by a very "swell-looking" young man.

The gentleman assisted the lady to enter the coach, spoke to the coachman, then entered himself.

The driver got on the box and drove off.

"Aha! there is mischief afoot!" the female spy cried. "For that is Curbstone Charley, the king of all the bunco men!"

"I must follow them!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TRACK.

WITH this dauntless woman man-hunter, action quickly followed thought; and as the coach drove off at a moderate pace, going toward Broadway, a passing cab was hailed and turned in toward the sidewalk.

"Do you want a fare?" the spy inquired.

"Indade an' I do!" was the 'Oirish' answer.

"See that dark-green coupe with the coachman in livery?"

"Yis, ma'am! It's all in me eye!"

"Follow it, and be very careful that the occupants do not detect what you are trying to do."

"Oho! I can do that same to the queen's taste," the driver asseverated with a grin.

"I will give you double fare!"

"Jump right in, miss, and you will see how n'ately I will do the thrick!"

He hurried down from the box as he spoke and opened the cab door.

Miss Moravia—to give the young woman the name by which she wished to be known—jumped into the vehicle with an alacrity which surprised the driver.

"Upon me word, it is a foine, strapping young woman she is!" he muttered to himself, as he again resumed his seat. "Shure, a college boy couldn't have b'ate her in getting into the cab!"

As Forty-second street is one of the busy thoroughfares of the town, usually well-filled with vehicles, the pursuit was not noticed.

The coachman never turned his head, but drove straight into and down Broadway, his horses at a slow trot, just as if he was not at all in a hurry.

The coupe went on until it reached Lower Broadway; then it turned into one of the cross streets leading to the North River.

The "cabby" kept about half a block behind the coupe, and when he came to the cross street he also turned down it.

The coupe went straight down to the river front, and drove out on the dock.

The cab followed, and the driver started his horse ahead, so that he arrived at the entrance to the pier just as the other vehicle drew up alongside of a small steamer.

The cab halted; the driver dismounted and came to the door of the cab.

"They are ather going on board of the Seabright boat, I think, ma'am," he announced.

"What time does the boat leave?"

"In an hour and a half."

"See if they go on board; wait until the coupe departs; then drive me as quickly as you can to the nearest Sixth Avenue 'L' station."

"Yis, ma'am; I'll be glad to do that same."

As "cabby" had anticipated, the lady and gentleman went on board the little steamer; then the coupe turned to depart.

Away went the cab at a good rate of speed to the nearest station on the Sixth Avenue L line, which was only a few blocks distant.

The female spy got out, paid the cabman, then hurried up the steps.

She was just in time to catch a train, and at once sped on up-town.

At Forty second street she took another cab which conveyed her to the door of the hotel.

She paid the man and bade him wait, saying that her brother was going down-town and wanted to ride to the L station.

Then the female spy hurried to her room, and there made her "lightning change" to the boy again.

The celerity with which she got out of

one character into the other was really marvelous.

She hastened to the street and accosted the cabman.

"Is this the cab that my sister came in?"

The cabman answered in the affirmative, and so complete was the change which this woman-man, or man-woman had made in her appearance, that the driver not only did not suspect that the two were one, but wondered that the brother and sister should be so unlike each other in appearance.

The youth was driven to the L Road station, and again had the luck to be just in time to catch a train.

And so little time had the spy taken that he arrived at the Seabright dock with fifteen minutes to spare!

"It would be odd, now, if this fellow had taken the girl somewhere else during my absence," the disguised detective thought, as he proceeded up the wharf to the steamboat.

But this was not the case, for before the spy got half-way to the steamer he saw the couple sitting on the upper after-deck of the boat.

"It is all right!" the spotter muttered. "There they are, and unless Mr. Curbstone Charley is a great deal smarter than I take him to be, I think I will be able to spoil his little game!"

"He is up to some kind of a scheme, undoubtedly," the spy decided. "He is now rigged out as a tip-top swell, and he never takes the trouble to assume a character of that kind without he is going to make some money out of it."

"The girl, too, is a pretty, ladylike little woman, not at all the kind that would be apt to consort with him; and then, too, from the extremely respectful way in which he is conducting himself it is plain that she is no ordinary acquaintance."

"This Curbstone Charley is such a thorough-paced rascal that when he is seen in the company of respectable people, it means that he purposes to get the best of them in some way."

"The girl is going with him willingly, so he must have imposed on her with some plausible story."

"It may prove a lucky thing for the young woman that I happened to catch sight of them."

Bob Ridley, to give him the name which he had claimed, boarded the steamboat and bought a ticket to the last landing the boat made, which was the little New Jersey village known as Branchport.

Then he sauntered to the upper deck and took a seat near the couple.

"Oh, I am right after you!" he murmured, in glee.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE PINES.

DURING the trip the disguised spotter kept his eyes upon the pair, but taking good care to avoid being suspected by the bunco-man.

Curbstone Charley—Charles Leverage was his right name, but his pals, and the police, seldom called him by his proper appellation—was an unusually shrewd and cunning scamp, and the sleuth-shadower understood that if he was not extremely cautious the crook would be sure to detect that he was being shadowed.

No incident of any importance occurred during the trip. The route of the boat was down New York Bay, then into and up the Shrewsbury River.

As the boat made the landings, the spy kept his eyes on the pair, but they did not leave the boat until the little village, the final stopping place of the boat, was reached.

An old-fashioned country "carryall" was in waiting for the two, driven by a medium-sized man with an ugly face.

Bob Ridley took a good look at this fellow.

"Well, if there ever was a man who had the word, rascal, emblazoned on his face this fellow is that man."

The carryall went off at a good pace, after the crook assisted the girl to the back seat, and got on the front one himself by the side of the driver.

Another old-fashioned carryall was stand-

ing at the boat-landing, waiting for passengers, but as it happened there wasn't any for it.

"It will be a difficult job to follow this fellow if he is going any distance over these country roads without his being aware that he is being shadowed," the detective mused as he reflected upon the feasibility of hiring the carryall.

"It has got to be done, though!" he decided, "or else I will have to give up the chase, and after I have come so far I have no mind to do that."

The driver in charge of the waiting vehicle was an overgrown country boy, seventeen or eighteen years old, rather green-looking, like the majority of his class, yet his face indicated that he was not deficient in a certain kind of shrewdness.

Whatever was to be done must be done quickly, for the other carryall was going off at good speed.

The country boy, noticing the stranger, approached and inquired if he wanted a carriage.

The disguised Bob, an excellent judge of horses, detected that, although the carryall was a shabby affair, the beast that drew it was a good one, far better than the horse attached to the other vehicle.

"Yes, I want a conveyance," the stranger replied, "and I want it for a peculiar purpose, too."

The boy grinned, and a look of surprise appeared on his face.

"Hey?" he inquired.

"See that carriage yonder?"

"Yes, but I don't know who 'tis, though I know 'bout all the folks for five miles round," the boy remarked, scratching his head as though that might aid him to solve the problem.

"I want to follow that carriage and find out where it is going. Do you suppose you can do it?"

"Sart'ini! Why not?"

"But, it is important, you know, that the people in the carriage shouldn't find out that they are being followed."

"Well, that won't be easy if the chaps take it inter their heads to look abind them," the boy decided, again scratching his head.

"I will do the best I kin," he continued, after a pause. "They hain't really got no right to kick if my carryall goes along the same road as their old consarn. These Jersey roads are free; these fellers don't own them!"

"Right you are, my friend and backer!" the detective encouraged, "so into your chariot and we'll be off! I'll take a back seat!"

"All right! Here goes for a flyer!" and away they went at a brisk pace.

The other carryall, after passing through the village, turned to the right and took a road which led into the interior country, as the driver took pains to inform his passenger.

"I didn't know but what they were going over to Long Branch, but this here road leads off into the pines, and it is a mighty lonely road, I tell you!"

"Why, after a couple of more miles we will get right into the pines, and then there isn't a house for three or four miles."

This statement set the detective to thinking.

If the bunco man intended to harm the girl, a lonely, desolate location, like the one which they were so rapidly approaching, would be just what he would seek.

"I rather think I was wise to follow this fellow, for I may be able to spoil his little game," Bob Ridley concluded.

After they began to get into the pines, the road curved so that at times the other carriage was out of sight.

"Is there any cross-road which he can turn down and so give us the slip?" the detective inquired, after the other carriage had got out of sight, owing to the curving of the road.

"Yes; there is one 'bout a quarter of a mile ahead," the boy answered.

"But you need not be alarmed 'bout their giving us the slip, 'cos they can't do it! If they turn at the cross-road I kin tell easy enough which way they went," he declared, with a knowing grin.

"By the tracks which they will leave in the sand?"

"Sart'ini!"

In due time the cross-road was reached, and the boy checked the speed of his horse so he could examine the road.

"They have gone to the right!" the driver announced.

"And where does that road go?"

"To the nigger settlement of Babylon, in the pines."

"Well, go ahead!"

The boy turned the horse into the cross-road, and they went ahead again at a good rate of speed.

The driver had not made any mistake about which way the carriage had gone, for upon coming around a turn in the road the pair again caught sight of it, and it was so much nearer this time than it had yet been that the suspicions of the detective were at once excited.

"Hello! I don't like the looks of this!" he exclaimed.

"They have slackened the speed of their horse, for we certainly didn't increase ours, but traveled along in the same level, even gait."

"That is so!"

"It may be that they have caught sight of us, and have a suspicion that we are following them?"

"Mebbe so."

The boy had sense enough to pull his horse down almost to a walk upon discovering how near he had got to the other vehicle, and then another turn in the road hid the first from the sight of those in the second carryall.

And now for half a mile the road curved first to the right, and then to the left, so that the pursuers did not catch sight of the other carriage.

Then the keen-eyed detective noticed a break in the pines ahead.

"What is that—another road?" he asked.

"Yes, a little track which goes back to that main road that we quitted for this cross one."

"It is a dollar to an orange that the fellows have turned back to the main road again!" the detective exclaimed.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I do! They detected that there was a carriage in their rear, and the suspicion came to them that it might be possible some one was trying to play the spy upon them," was the explanation.

"Yes, mebbe!"

"And as I have an idea these fellows are not engaged in any honest game, they would be just the men to suspect that some one was watching them."

"You are right, by hooky!" the boy exclaimed, taking a deep interest in the proceedings.

"Slow up when you come to the other road, and if the carriage hasn't doubled back to the main thoroughfare then I am greatly mistaken."

The driver obeyed the instructions.

As it happened, the road upon which they were traveling now broadened as it came to where the other led from it, so the pursuers had a good view.

It was as Bob Ridley anticipated; the marks in the sand plainly revealed that the other carryall had turned into the narrow way.

The driver had pulled his horse into a walk, and was just turning into the little road when the driver of the first carryall made his appearance.

He had been hiding behind a tree, and the moment he made his appearance the detective guessed that the crook had become satisfied that he was being followed, and this fellow had been placed in ambush so as to make sure of the fact.

"See here! I want you to understand that this 'ere thing has gone about far enough!" the fellow exclaimed in an ugly way, and with an angry scowl on his dark face.

As he spoke he advanced to the center of the road so as to bar the passage.

The horse could not go on without running over him, so the intelligent beast came to a halt.

"What in thunder do you mean?" the youth asked, pretending to be vastly astonished.

"Oh, you know well enough!" the man retorted. "And you kin bet your sweet life that I am going to put a stop to the little game right here and now."

"What little game?" the boy demanded with an air of injured innocence.

"Oh, yes, you don't know nothing about it, of course!" was the dark-browed fellow's retort. "You haven't been following my wagon ever since I left the steamboat dock?"

"What kind of a wagon is yours?" the driver inquired, and he really looked as if he was curious to receive the information.

"Ah, come off!" the other growled in disgust. "You gawky, you can't git around me with no such nonsense as that. You know well enough what kind of a wagon it is without my telling you."

"But, that ain't neither here or there. It goes ag'in' my grain to have any slab-sided cuss of *your* style a-follerin' my wagon 'round the country, and I ain't a-going to have it."

"I don't know what you want and I don't care, but I have jest made up my mind to put a stop to it; so, Mister Man, jest have the perliteness to turn yer hoss 'round and travel off in some other direction, for down this ere road you ain't a-going!"

"I reckon that you hain't got no real right to stop me!" the youth exclaimed, sulkily.

The boy knew very well that he wasn't any match for the fellow, who was rather stoutly built, and, as it never entered his head that it was likely the dudish-looking New Yorker could do anything in the fighting line, he thought there wasn't anything to do but to comply with the order.

"It don't matter a durn whether I have got any right to stop you or not!" the fellow declared. "You can bet your sweet life that I am going to do it, and that is all there is to this little picnic!" with insolent bravado.

The detective judged that it was about time he said something.

So he leaned over the seat and, in a very dudish way, observed:

"See here, young fellow, if you don't get out of the way so that this vehicle can pass, I shall be obliged to get out and chastise you!"

The fellow looked at the speaker for a moment, and then he burst into a loud laugh.

"Hop down as soon as you can and I'll wipe up the ground with you!" he cried, in derision.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

As the spotter-sleuth had expected, Curbstone Charley was too shrewd a fellow not to take alarm when he made the discovery that there was a carriage in the rear, for vehicles are few and far between on the lonely roads in the pines.

He communicated his fears that the carryall was on their track in a whisper to his companion.

And, though the latter was not inclined to believe that any one would take the trouble to give chase to them, yet when he got a good look at the vehicle, and recognized it as the one which had been standing at the landing, he had to admit that it did look suspicious.

Then the pair played the trick of making the *detour* by the cross-road, and when they found that the carryall came directly after, they sought to devise a way to throw the pursuer off the track.

Then an idea came to the driver—who was named William Blister, commonly called by his pals either "Kid" Blister, or "Billy" Blister.

He rather prided himself upon his fighting abilities, for he had been in half a dozen corner saloon "scraps" and succeeded in "doing" his man, so he told his companion that if he laid in wait for the other carriage he would either make the other "feller" go straight on up the cross-road, if he manifested any intention of turning into the narrow way, or else "lick him within an inch of his life!"

Curbstone Charley thought the idea was a good one, and so it was executed by Billy Blister, as we have described.

The carryall, now driven by Curbstone Charley, went through the narrow way until it came to the main thoroughfare; then it proceeded along that road until it emerged

from the pines into a somewhat open but desolate-looking country.

Then, when the vehicle came to a small road running off to the left, it turned into it, proceeded for a short half mile, and drove into the yard of a solid looking old farmhouse.

The carriage was evidently expected, for a stout, middle-aged woman, with a coarse, red face, which showed plainly the marks of dissipation, advanced to meet the vehicle.

"Why, Miss Jeanette, is that *you*?" the woman exclaimed, as she opened the door of the carryall, and extended her hands to assist the girl to get out.

"Lord love your heart! how you *have* changed, to be sure!" the woman continued, as the young lady descended from the carriage.

"But then, that is only natural, for there has many a long year come and gone since I have set my two eyes on your sweet face!"

"I don't s'pose you remember me, of course—Aunt Sally—that is what they used to call me!"

"No, I really do not," the girl replied, evidently making a strong effort to recollect.

"Well, it ain't so very strange now, when you come to think of it," the woman remarked. "Why, Lord love you, child! you was only a little kid then, not over two or three years old!"

"It isn't strange, then," the girl remarked with a smile.

She was a good-looking, dark-haired, dark-eyed maiden, very ladylike in her appearance, evidently one who came of a good family, and who had been carefully reared.

"But I think I should have known you anyway by your likeness to your mother!" the woman declared.

"Ah, your mother was a real out-and-out lady, if there ever was such a thing in this world, and you take right after her; I can see that plainly, with half an eye!"

"My mother died when I was so young that I do not remember her at all," the girl answered, and with a pensive look on her intelligent face.

"Well, deary, she looked jest like you for all the world!" the woman asserted.

"Yes, miss, you and she are jest as much alike as two peas in a pod, and I tell you what it is, it jest does my eyes good to git a sight of your face, for it does so remind me of old times."

"Ah, many is the jolly hour that I have spent with your mother, for she was rare good company. I was her nurse, you know, and a nicer lady never drew the blessed breath of life!"

"But there, here I am chattering, jest like a regular Poll Parrot, keeping you out in the yard when I don't doubt that you are tired to death after your long ride."

"Oh, no, it has been a pleasant trip, and I do not feel fatigued."

"But you must be a little tired, so come right into the house. I've got a little lunch set out for you."

"Come along!"

Then the woman bustled into the house and showed the girl into the parlor of the old mansion.

It was an old-fashioned room, such as are only to be found nowadays in remote country places.

The woman helped the girl to lay aside her things, and then brought a cushioned rocking-chair for her, which she placed beside the center-table, upon which was a tray containing some cold roast-beef, biscuits, and little cakes with a bottle of wine.

"Now, my dear Jeanette, I jest want you to try a little sup of my home-made currant wine!" the woman exclaimed, as she filled out a wine-glass full of the red liquid.

"Your ma—Lord love her heart—used to say that she didn't believe there was anybody on earth who could make currant-wine equal to mine."

The girl smiled and drank the contents of the tiny wine-glass.

Strange was the effect the "wine" produced.

Hardly had the girl returned the glass to the hag, when her head sunk back, a deep sigh came from her lips, and she quickly became insensible.

How long she remained in this state she knew not, but when she recovered her senses

again she found herself lying on a pile of straw in what was apparently a damp and unwholesome cellar.

No ray of daylight penetrated into it, but an old square lantern, hanging from a beam, partially dispelled the gloom.

"Great heavens! where am I?" cried the girl in terrible alarm.

CHAPTER XI.

A DREADFUL REVELATION.

THE girl had risen to a sitting posture, although her head still swam from the effects of the potent drug so deftly administered in the glass of currant wine which she had taken without suspicion.

"This is the cellar evidently; but, why have I been put here, and what does it mean?"

The girl rose slowly to her feet, stared around her for a moment, and then approached the door.

Although she had been brought up in a small Western town, yet she had read enough about the tricks and traps of a wicked world to understand that she had fallen into a snare.

"Oh, this is too dreadful!" she exclaimed.

"But, is it not possible for me to escape?"

Then she proceeded to make a careful examination of the surroundings.

There was no doubt that she was in a cellar—the cellar of the old-fashioned mansion where the red-faced woman had received her in so friendly a manner.

And the girl sighed as she reflected upon the circumstance.

"Alas! that there should be such duplicity in the world!" she exclaimed, shaking her head in sadness.

The cellar was evidently all below the surface of the earth, for there were no windows, no means of communication with the outer air but the door.

And this was a stout structure composed of heavy planks, firmly put together and cross-braced so that it would have defied the assaults of a powerful man, unless he was provided with the proper tools for breaking a way through.

There was no hope that a slender, delicate girl could succeed in forcing so powerful a barrier.

"No, no, there is no hope of my being able to break down the door!" she cried, in utter despair.

And the girl presented a pitiful appearance as she stood with the dim rays of the old lantern falling upon her face.

Her dark hair had escaped from its fastenings and floated down loosely over her shoulders.

Her eyes wandered wildly around the cellar, but naught but the bare stone wall, and the heap of straw in the corner, met her view.

Her jailers had been careful not to allow even a chair, or stool, or, in fact, anything to remain in the apartment which the girl could use as a means to effect her escape.

Again, in a state bordering upon frenzy, she made an examination of the walls and the door.

But the solid rocks and the massive wooden structure which guarded the portal securely hemmed her in.

"I must not give way to this excitement or I shall go crazy!" she exclaimed, as she halted in the center of the apartment and pressed her hands upon her throbbing temples.

"I must try to be calm—try to retain all my senses, and keep from going mad, although it is enough to dethrone any one's reason to be shut up in such a dreadful place as this!"

Then the girl seated herself upon the heap of straw and tried to account for her being in her present position.

But the more she reflected, the more bewildered she became.

"Oh, there is no use of my racking my brains over the matter," she murmured at last.

"I must be patient, and in time the explanation will come."

"It is evident that I have fallen into the hands of my enemies, and yet I was not aware that I had a single foe in the world."

The girl was of a resolute nature, and now

that she had determined to be patient she soon succeeded in composing herself.

"Of course, in time some one will come, and then I will have an opportunity of learning what is the meaning of this strange affair," she murmured.

This reflection was correct, for after the girl had been in the apartment an hour or so, according to her judgment, she heard the sound of a key turning in the lock which fastened the cellar door.

Jeanette did not rise, but only fixed her eyes expectantly upon the entrance.

It was the red-faced woman who had declared herself to be Aunt Sally.

In her hand she had a tray containing eatables, and she looked inquisitively at the girl as she entered.

The door swung shut after she passed, and from the sharp click which came from it, it was evident that it was guarded by a spring lock.

The woman was plainly surprised to see the girl appear so composed, and she surveyed her with a puzzled expression.

"Well, how do you find yourself, deary?" the woman asked in the same soft, wheedling tone which she had assumed upon first meeting the girl.

"I am not at all well, for the drug that you gave me in the currant wine has given me a headache," the girl replied.

"Is that so?" the woman inquired. "Well, well, that is too bad, and I am real sorry!" and the speaker shook her head, and tried to assume a sympathetic expression.

"But what does it mean? Why did you give me the drug, and what is the reason for my being confined in this dreadful place?" the girl asked in an earnest way, yet striving with all her power to keep from becoming excited.

"Now don't get fretful, deary, for it is all for your good," the woman responded in a soothing tone, such as one would use to a refractory child.

"For my good!" Jeanette demanded in utter astonishment.

"Yes, you know that you are not very well."

"I am not very well?"

"Yes, that is the truth, you know."

"But it isn't! I am well—I never was any better in my life!"

"Of course you think so," the woman responded in the wheedling tone which now grated fearfully on the ears of Jeanette.

"But there isn't any doubt about it!" the girl persisted, utterly astonished by this intelligence.

"I s'pose you are thinking about your bodily health," the woman observed in a significant way.

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I was not speaking about that; it is your mind that is affected."

"My mind!" exclaimed Jeanette, utterly astounded, and she rose to her feet as she spoke.

"Yes, your mind; but don't get excited now, deary," the woman remarked, placing the tray upon the ground, and then facing the girl with the false, unmeaning smile upon her lips.

"But this is monstrous!" Jeanette declared in righteous indignation.

"Don't get nervous and flighty now, deary, for that is about the worst thing you can do," the woman continued. "I am an old nurse, you know, and I know jest what I am talking about."

"If you get excited and begin to rave, I shall have to put a strait jacket on you so that you will not do any damage to yourself."

"You cannot surely believe that I am out of my mind!" Jeanette declared, so amazed at this unexpected turn of affairs that she hardly knew what to say.

"Why, of course! If you wasn't out of your senses you wouldn't be here."

"But isn't this Mr. Hubberton's farmhouse?" the girl exclaimed.

"Oh, no, my deary, not at all. Bless your heart! you innocent little creature! that was only a trick on the part of the doctor to get you to come here without making any trouble."

"The doctor!" Jeanette exclaimed, more and more amazed.

"What doctor? I haven't seen any doctor!"

"Oh, yes, you have!" and the woman indulged in a prolonged chuckle.

"But I know better!" the girl persisted. "I would surely know whether I have seen a doctor or not, and I tell you that I haven't."

"Well, I didn't get it exactly right when I said that you had seen the doctor," the woman explained.

"What I ought to have said was that the doctor saw you."

"Saw me?"

"Yes, it was yesterday when you visited the office of Kankershaw, the lawyer."

"I was at his office yesterday, certainly; that is the truth, but I did not see any one but Mr. Kankershaw, and his clerk, the young man in the outer office."

Again the woman chuckled.

"Well, deary, they didn't want to have any trouble with you, and they wished to arrange matters in the easiest way," she explained.

"The doctor was afraid that if he attempted to make a regular examination you might get violent, so he sat in the next room, with the door ajar; he could hear all that either you or the lawyer said, you understand, and when Mr. Kankershaw put all those questions to you about your life it was for the purpose of enabling the doctor to form an opinion as to whether you were insane enough to warrant your being committed to a place like this."

"A place like this!" Jeanette exclaimed, with dilating eyes.

"In Heaven's name, what kind of a place is it?" she continued.

"Why, it is a private lunatic asylum," the woman replied.

"Can it be possible?" the girl cried, hardly knowing what she said.

"Oh, yes. It is conducted by Doctor Gottleheim a gentleman who has a great deal of experience in the care of the insane, and his asylum is one of the best in the country," the woman explained.

"This is too dreadful!"

"Oh, you will soon get used to it, if you will only make up your mind to be nice and quiet, and not to make any trouble."

"Mebbe, arter awhile you will get rid of your insane delusions, and then the doctor will be only too glad to discharge you," the woman continued, while the girl surveyed her with a face full of astonishment.

"I have known quite a number of patients who appeared to be much worse than you are when they came, who got well and were discharged after a few weeks under the doctor's treatment, so I don't see any reason why you should not get well again."

"What in Heaven's name do you mean?" the girl cried, in utter amazement.

"What insane delusions have I?"

"Oh, of course, you think the ideas are all right, and that is where the insanity comes in, deary," the old woman responded in her wheedling tones.

"But what are they?" the girl persisted.

"Why, this story that you told Lawyer Kankershaw about your being the daughter of Clement Hubberton."

"But it is the truth!" the girl declared. "Clement Hubberton was my father!"

"Oh, yes, but not the Clement Hubberton who was the brother of Mister Godfrey Hubberton."

"Yes, that is true, too."

"That is one of your insane delusions, deary, for Lawyer Kankershaw knows that it isn't the truth."

Jeanette gazed at the woman for a moment in profound astonishment.

"How can you say such a thing as that?" she declared. "Mr. Kankershaw knows that I told him the truth, and he agreed to take my case and secure for me the rights out of which I have been defrauded."

The woman laughed contemptuously.

"Oh, yes, I know all about that, my deary!" she exclaimed, her voice changing from the soft, wheedling tone to one of decided harshness.

"He detected right at the beginning that you were out of your mind, for he is well acquainted with Mister Godfrey Hubberton, and when you told your cock-and-bull story about your being the daughter of his brother, and how you had been brought up out West, without knowing any of the particulars about your father and mother until the

woman who raised you was on her death bed and then told you the story, he knew it wasn't so."

"But it is the truth!" Jeanette persisted. "And when I showed Mr. Kankershaw my papers, he said he would be glad to take my case, for there wasn't a doubt in his mind that I would succeed in making good my claim."

Again the woman laughed contemptuously.

"Ah, my deary, you are such a simple, artless little creature!" she exclaimed.

"Don't you understand that the lawyer, who is a very smart man, detected immediately that you wasn't right in your head, and so he made up his mind to humor you in your delusions?"

"No, no, it is not possible!" Jeanette cried.

"Oh, yes, it is. It's the truth I am telling you!"

"The lawyer knew you were cranky, but as you were such an innocent little thing, he made up his mind to see if you couldn't be cured."

"He put himself in communication with Mr. Godfrey Hubberton, and though a great banker like he is might naturally be angry at an attempt to impose on him, yet he took the lawyer's view of the matter and agreed that you ought to be put in some place where you might be cured."

"The man whom I trusted then betrayed me into the hands of the one who had been false to his brother's faith!" the girl exclaimed with a white face.

"That is another one of your delusions, and you will have to get rid of all those ideas before you can hope to get out of here!" the woman cried, harshly.

The girl heaved a deep sigh and cast her eyes upon the ground.

Now she thought she comprehended the nature of the trap into which she had fallen.

She meditated over the matter for a few moments.

"Do you know whether Mr. Kankershaw will come to see me so I can have a talk with him about this matter?" she asked at last.

The woman had watched Jeanette's face closely, and a smile of satisfaction appeared on her coarse features when she saw that the girl appeared to be resigned to her fate.

"Oh, yes, just as soon as I report to the doctor that you seem to be a great deal better, and I think you are in a condition to talk sensibly about any matter, he will send to the lawyer to come."

"Make the report as soon as you can, please, for it is dreadful to be obliged to remain in this terrible place," Jeanette declared with a shudder, as she looked around her.

"I can have him down here to-morrow, I think," the woman replied.

"It depends upon you, you know," she continued.

"There will probably be some papers to sign, and I suppose you will have to agree to give up this ridiculous claim of yours, but I don't doubt you will get a nice little sum out of the thing."

"Send for the lawyer as soon as you can!" the girl exclaimed.

The woman said she would, and then she took her departure.

"Oh, Heaven, will you allow this wrong to be done to the orphan girl?" Jeanette cried in despair.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PLOTTERS.

IN such a cosmopolitan place as Long Branch, it was not a difficult matter for a man who had the *entree* to good society, as the Englishman, Fitz Gerald, certainly had, to obtain an introduction to a lady occupying the position in the social "swim" which Banker Hubberton's wife possessed.

It had become quite a fad among the ladies, who lived in the Ocean avenue cottages, to rise at an unusual early hour—for them—repair to the beach and enjoy a promenade before breakfast, for the purpose of getting an appetite for the morning meal.

Mrs. Hubberton had never indulged in this custom, for she was one of the ladies who seldom went to bed until after midnight, and never got up until nine or ten o'clock in the morning.

But, when it became necessary for her to

have an interview with Fitz Gerald, and it was important that the interview should be held in such a place that they would be able to converse freely without danger of being overheard, and yet the matter must be so arranged that no ill-natured gossips would be apt to see the pair together under such circumstances as to cause remark, thoughts of the latest fashionable fad came to the banker's wife.

Therefore on the first opportunity she informed the Englishman that she was going to rise at six o'clock, on the following morning, and take a promenade on the beach, so if he should happen "accidentally" to meet her they could stroll along together.

"Or go into one of the summer-houses," Fitz Gerald suggested.

"They are all open, and every one sitting in one of them is exposed to the view of all who are passing, therefore if any gossip should happen to see us conversing together, they could not say there was anything secret about our meeting."

The banker's wife nodded assent.

So it happened that, on the following morning, as Mrs. Hubberton descended the steps which led to the beach from her cottage grounds, she saw the Englishman enjoying a cigar in the same summer-house where they had held their previous conversation.

He rose and saluted Mrs. Hubberton with the most courtly politeness.

"We are going to have the beach to ourselves this morning, I think, for I haven't seen a soul," Fitz Gerald remarked as they sat down.

"Nobody is awake in the house, either, nor is there likely to be until about seven, so I came out without being observed, and there is a good chance that I can return without any one knowing that I have been absent."

"Good! It is always prudent not to give any one a chance to talk."

"I have been thinking over the conversation we had," the banker's wife opened the conversation. "My fate is in your hands, of course, since you have it in your power to ruin me," and the woman, with an anxious look upon her face, showed how deeply she felt her peril.

"Now, now, really, I do hope that you have not allowed this matter to worry you!" the adventurer exclaimed. "I tried my best to make you understand that I wasn't going to be cruel to you."

"Oh, yes; I know what you said; and I don't doubt that you wouldn't trouble me unless you were really obliged to by the force of circumstances," she replied; "but, if you were dreadfully hard pushed for money, and knew no other way to get it than by being cruel to me, why, I suppose you couldn't help yourself," gazing wistfully into his face.

"No, Angelina, I am not quite such a rascal as all that!" the Englishman protested. "I know that I am not any better than I ought to be, and for a scion of one of the oldest and noblest houses in the United Kingdom I have led an awfully wild life; in fact, I don't mind admitting to you that I have done some things which ought to be enough to make some of my noble ancestors rise from the tomb to reprove me!" he declared with a sardonic laugh.

"But there is one merit I do possess, and that is, I am faithful to my friends, and I never make war upon women unless I am attacked so bitterly as to be obliged to fight back in self-defense."

"Now, then, you have always been good and true to me, loyal to the core! Circumstances obliged us to separate, and now that we meet again I find fortune has most signally favored you, which is all right, for, in my opinion, you richly deserve to prosper."

"Now, then, understand me, Angelina, I am not the man to put a single straw in your way. As it happens, I am confoundedly in want of money just now; from a hundred to five hundred would help me out amazingly, but if it is not convenient for you to get the money, it is all right, and I will take the will for the deed."

"As to trying to force you to raise the money for me by threats, or anything of that kind, nothing is further from my thoughts."

"Well, I must admit you were always good to me," the woman confessed.

"And I will be good to you now!" the Englishman averred, with evident heartiness.

"Of course it was my idea that, as the wife of the rich banker, it would be an easy matter for you to get me five hundred or even a thousand dollars," he continued.

"It was not possible for me to know how you were situated; but, now you have explained that your husband is one of the stingy kind—who doles out the money in little sums—I can readily understand that you cannot aid me to the extent I expected."

"I have thought of a way, though, by which I can get about five hundred dollars, if you are so situated that you *must* have the money," Mrs. Hubbardton remarked.

"Without inconvenience, or danger to yourself?" Fitz Gerald asked.

"Well, very little, I think," she replied. "I will explain, and then you will understand."

"I have some diamonds which my husband has given me from time to time. Although Mr. Hubbardton is a wealthy man, yet he is as keen for a bargain as though he had to struggle hard for a living, and all the diamonds which he has bestowed upon his daughter and myself he has bought from men who were in need of money and so obliged to sacrifice something."

"A thrifty gentleman, truly!" Fitz Gerald assumed;—"always quick to seize upon a bargain!"

"I am not in the habit of wearing all my diamonds at the same time, and so, if I pawn some of them it is not likely my husband would miss them."

"Ah, yes; the matter could be arranged in that way," the man admitted.

"But, you need not be in a hurry," he continued. "I can get along for a week or so, and I do not wish you to do this unless it is absolutely necessary."

"By the way, I have been watching your step-daughter, Magdalene, lately, and although, as you remarked, she is not a beauty, yet, for the sake of her half a million of dollars I think I would be willing to put up with her as a wife."

"If we play our cards carefully, I think the matter can be arranged," and Mrs. Hubbardton seemed to fall in with the idea.

"She is an odd girl, inclined to be decidedly romantic, and as she assumes that every man who comes near her in the guise of a suitor is attracted solely by her money, she is a difficult girl for a lover to approach."

"Yes, I should say so."

"I get along all right with her, for I am always good-natured and complaisant. From the beginning I made it a point to be agreeable to her, no matter if she was inclined to be ugly. I never complained to her father in regard to her treatment of me, although, at first, she was particularly aggravating, but I never varied in my manner toward her, being always patient and conciliatory."

"The girl is really not bad-hearted, and when she found that I was resolved not to be resentful, no matter how she acted, her conscience smote her and she treated me better."

"I was her father's wife; and though I did not pretend to be anything more than an English girl, of a fairly good family, no one knew anything to my discredit, and all had to admit that I comported myself with lady-like propriety in my present station."

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt that, for you were always quick to adapt yourself to the situation, no matter what it was."

"Now then, I have been giving considerable thought to this matter, and have come to the conclusion that the only chance for you to produce any impression on the girl is to make her acquaintance in some peculiarly romantic manner."

"Ah, yes, I see; and if the acquaintance is brought about in that way she will not think I am seeking her on account of her money."

"Exactly! that is the ideal!"

"Now then, I have hit on a plan," the banker's wife explained. "She has a pony, and a village-cart, and is fond of taking long drives through the lonely pine woods in the interior of the country back of Long Branch."

"She has often told me of these drives, and of how much she enjoys the solitudes of the woods, where she says she sometimes drives for miles without meeting a soul."

"Yes, that is true enough," the English-

man assured. "I took a spin down to Ocean Grove the other day with young Vanderhoff, who was trying a new trotter which he had just bought, and on our return we took one of the interior roads, lost our way, got into the pines, where we drove about for an hour or so without meeting a soul from whom we could inquire the way, and, finally, came out at Oceanport, three or four miles above here."

"She has described to me the course which she usually takes, so that I can tell you the route," Mrs. Hubbardton remarked, "so this is my idea: Can you not arrange with a couple of rough fellows to waylay the girl at some lonely spot in the pines, and demand her money and jewelry?"

"I have it fixed so that she will be stopped just after turning a bend in the road; then, while she is attempting to expostulate with the ruffians, as she will be certain to do, you will make your appearance on horseback, the bend will conceal you until you are right on the party, and the soft sand will deaden the sound of your horse's hoofs, if you come up at a slow pace."

"A most excellent plan!" the Englishman acquiesced, smilingly.

"Then, after you appear, the ruffians, seeing that there is but a single man, will threaten to kill you if you do not depart, reluctant to give up the prize which they apparently secured; but you, although without a weapon, except a good stout riding-whip, will boldly ride at the scoundrels."

"They will fire at you. You will not be hurt, of course, for the cartridges will be blank; and when they see that you are determined to fight them, they will be seized with a panic and will fly for escape as fast as they can."

The Englishman indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Upon my word, Angelina, you have formed an extremely good scheme!" he declared, "and I do not see any reason why it should not succeed. If it does, that surely will be making her acquaintance in a manner to produce an impression, if, as you say, she is inclined to be romantic."

"Yes, she is decidedly given that way, as I have said; and, as you have never tried to make her acquaintance at the two or three hops she has attended since you have been an inmate of the hotel, she will be certain to conclude that you are not a fortune-hunter."

"That is true; you see it all with a woman's eyes."

"And then she will undoubtedly relate the particulars of the affair to me, and I can tell her that I have met you, and have been informed that you belong to one of the best families in England."

"And you can also say you have heard that, when an elder brother, or an uncle, or some relative dies, you don't remember which, I will come in for a great estate and a title—duke, you believe," the Englishman suggested.

"That is a good idea."

"I will set to work at once to carry out the scheme, and you had better raise a couple of hundred for me. Send it by Express from New York to me at the hotel."

"I will do so to-day, for I am going to the city."

Then they parted, to carry out surf-house conspiracy.

CHAPTER XIII.

APPEARANCES ARE DECEPTIVE.

"WHAT is that you say?" the disguised detective demanded, as the defiance of the rough fellow fell upon his ears.

"What is the matter with you?" the other retorted. "Hav'n't you got any ears? Don't you understand good United States talk?"

"When you say you are going to wipe up the earth with me do you mean to infer that you are going to inflict personal chastisement upon me?" the supposed dude asked, getting out of the carriage as he spoke.

The dark browed tough was rather astonished by this move, for he did not think the effeminate looking stranger would dare to risk an encounter with him.

"You have got it jest right!" he assured; "I am jest sp'iling to knock the stuffing out of a dude of about your size."

And, with the bravado of his class, he pulled off his coat and cast it on the ground.

"Come now! get a move on yer!" he cried; "peel off yer coat and come up to the scratch!" "squaring off" at the other in true prize-ring style.

"Put up yer dukes, I says, and lemme get a chance to sp'ile that nice little white face of yours! I hain't knocked out a dude for so long that I almost forget how many raps it generally takes to do the trick; but, to the best of my remembrance I generally do up a dude in a minute and a half!"

"Throw off the half-minute this time and call it a minute, will you?" the delighted detective remarked, as he removed his coat in an extremely cool and easy way.

The tough was surprised by the sangfroid manifested by the other, while the boy driver stared in amazement.

Making the mistake that all these ignorant men are so apt to make, of completely under-rating his antagonist, the tough had made up his mind to have some "fun" with the dude.

He would play with him for awhile, spar and draw him out, and then go in and "kill" him, as he would have expressed it, if he had put his ideas into words.

So, when the supposed dude faced him, he "sparred" at him as though he was a boxing-master of high degree.

He skipped about in the sand, flourished, his fists, and pretended to make all sorts of blows at the head of Ridley; and when he thought he had his man sufficiently rattled, he pushed in to "knock him out" in short order.

But now the unexpected happened, for the dude "led" with his right for the head of his opponent.

The stroke came with the precision of a piston-rod, and the tough, taken by surprise, threw up both arms to guard against the blow.

This left his body unprotected.

The lead at the head was but a feint, and the moment that the tough threw up his arms Ridley sent in a "left-hander," which, alighting just over the rough's heart, half-doubled him up.

The surprised tough lowered his guard, when, with lightning-like quickness, the detective dealt his opponent a right-hand smash between the eyes which sent the fellow over on his back with astonishing quickness.

Too late the tough realized that he had caught the worst kind of a Tartar; never, in all his experience, had he received two such awful blows.

It was fully a minute before the man got on his feet again, and a sorry-looking spectacle he presented.

The blow in the face had blackened both eyes, and raised a lump on his puffy forehead almost as big as a hen's egg.

The fellow was a dull brute enough, but knew enough to understand that when it came to a game of fisticuffs he was not "in it" with the stranger. He was a whipped man.

After he got on his feet—and he was very slow in rising—he stood and scowled at the New Yorker for a moment, then he said:

"I am a good man, an' I've had a hundred fights, an' never got licked more'n five or ten times, but, blame me, if I ever run up ag'in' a bloke like you afore!"

And as he spoke he rubbed the bump on his forehead in a rueful way.

"Oh, just accidental blows, you know," the New Yorker replied, carelessly. "Maybe I couldn't succeed in landing that way on you again in a month. Let us try another round, just for fun!"

And the disguised Ridley threw himself into a boxing position as he spoke.

"Not by a blame sight!" the fellow exclaimed. "You don't git another chance to hammer me if I know myself. A man don't have to kick me out of his place more than two or three times afore I git the idea into my head that I ain't wanted."

"Then you will not try another round?" Ridley inquired.

"No more in mine if I know myself!" the other replied, decidedly; "but, I say, there is one thing I would like to know, and that is what in blazes did you two fellers want to foller me for, hey?"

"That is easily explained," the young man replied. "I hired this youth to drive me over to Babylon, and he thought he was ac-

quainted with the roads, but, after we got into the pines he suddenly made up his mind that he had lost his way, then I caught sight of your vehicle ahead, and I suggested to him that if he followed you he would be able to find his way out of the woods."

This was a reasonable explanation and completely satisfied the tough.

"Oh, yes, I see," he assented.

"But, I say, my friend, since you were so anxious to know why we were following you, suppose I ask what objection was there to our doing it if we wanted to? The roads are free, I believe."

"Oh, yes, of course, but, you see, it was only a notion of mine, and I s'pose I hadn't any right to interfere with you, but I was curious for to know why you was a-follering of my wagon, and so I reckoned I would try a little bulldozing game on you."

"The game didn't work quite as well as you expected though," the detective suggested.

"You are right, by blazes!" the tough growled in a disgusted way. "I slipped up on it mighty bad, but you kin go where you please now for all of me. So-long!"

And the bruised bruiser took his way along the road in the direction of Branch-town.

Ridley resumed his seat in the wagon, and again the carryall went on its way.

"I tell you what it is, stranger, that feller didn't stand no more chance with you than a barnyard rooster would with an eagle!" the youth exclaimed.

"Well, he didn't have much show, that is a fact," the detective observed.

"From his appearance and language I should take him to be one of New York's rounders, who are only dangerous when they are in a gang."

"And didn't you wallop him though!" cried the boy, with a hilarious laugh.

"Yes; I didn't have much trouble in getting away with him, but I am afraid he has succeeded in his design of making us lose track of the carriage."

"Oh, I reckon we will be able to follow it by the marks in the road," the youth declared confidently, and he put on the whip.

Five minutes more, and they came to where the little road ran into the main thoroughfare, and both passenger and driver were on the alert to catch sight of the tracks.

A disappointment awaited them.

In the narrow way the wheel-tracks of the other carryall were plainly visible, but they suddenly disappeared at the junction of the two roads, and Ridley, after getting out and making a careful examination, decided that the trail was lost, for there were so many other wheel-tracks in the road going in both directions that the searcher found it impossible to decide which ones were made by the vehicle he was endeavoring to follow.

"To the left leads back to Long Branch, does it not?" the detective asked.

"Yes, sir."

"The carriage would not have gone that way, unless the fellow has made a wide double for the purpose of throwing us off the track, which I don't think is likely, so we will turn to the right and go on for awhile," and as he spoke, Ridley resumed his seat.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNTIRING SLEUTH-HOUND.

In a few minutes' time the road ran out of the pines into an open country, desolate and lonesome enough, for the loose sand still continued, and the only timber growth to be seen were a few scrubby oaks and the everlasting pines and cedars.

"This is the end of the pines, eh?" the New Yorker questioned.

"Yas; we have got through them."

"This part of the country does not seem to be very thickly settled."

"No, 'tain't for a fact," the youth admitted. "The houses are 'bout half a mile apart, and 'bout half the farms ain't got nobody living on 'em."

"Deserted, eh?"

"Yes, sir, folks found it was hard work to make a living and so they jest cleared out."

This was an important bit of information.

If the bunco-man, Curbstone Charley, was up to any mischief—if he had induced the neatly dressed innocent-looking girl to ac-

company him with a design to do her harm, a locality of this kind would be just the one which the rascal would naturally select.

He could easily secure possession of one of the deserted farm-houses, and then, if he once succeeded in getting the girl into the house she would be wholly at his mercy.

"Yes, it is just the spot for a villain of this kind to carry out an evil scheme," the disguised Ridley decided.

"Accident has placed me on the track, though, and I will not leave it until I have run the game to earth," he continued. "But it is going to be a difficult job—that is evident."

The carriage went on for a couple of miles, and in that time passed five solitary old farms.

All the while the detective was making a careful examination of the road, hoping to be able to detect freshly-made marks of carriage-wheels; but the sand was so loose and light that, owing to the gentle breeze which had now sprung up, the marks made by the wheels were blotted out almost as soon as they were made.

The sun was now well down, and soon the shades of night would begin to gather.

"You might as well turn around and go back," the New Yorker remarked to the driver; "there is not much chance of our getting on the track of the wagon again."

"Jest what I think," the youth responded.

"You flaxed blazes out of the feller without any trouble, but he kept you back long enough to give the wagon a chance to get out of the way."

"Yes, there isn't any use of our keeping on; so we will go as far as the cross road which I see ahead, and if there are no signs there of the carryall, we will go back."

"All right! I kin turn all right at the cross roads."

When this point was reached, the New Yorker got out and made a careful examination of the ground, but the search was fruitless; no trace could he find to denote that a carriage had recently gone along any of the roads.

The driver turned the carriage, Ridley resumed his seat and the return began.

Although baffled for the time, yet the special was not willing to allow that he was beaten.

"I think the chances are about a thousand to one that I have hit on the right locality," he mused.

"What game the fellow is trying to play, it is, of course, impossible for me to guess, but from what I know of the man I am satisfied he hasn't brought that lady-like looking girl to this desolate region for any good purpose."

"I will have to assume a disguise, and make a house-to-house search, for, as far as I can see that is the only feasible way of finding out where the girl has been taken."

Having come to this conclusion Ridley turned his attention to procuring a new disguise. Of course he had a dozen in New York, and by taking a train for the city he would be able to get one and return by one of the earliest trains in the morning so as to be on the ground in good season.

He ordered the driver to proceed directly to the railway station, so he could take a train for New York.

As the vehicle passed through Branchport, Ridley saw a tin-peddler's wagon drive into the shed of the little country hotel.

An idea at once occurred to him.

"Stop a moment and let me get out. There's a man I want to see!" he explained.

The driver pulled up his horse, when Ridley jumped out and hastened into the shed.

The peddler's wagon is a regular visitor to all country communities, selling all sorts of articles, and is usually received with open arms.

It was the detective's notion to make a bargain with the vender.

As his assistant, in a suitable disguise, he would be able to visit all the farm-houses in the neighborhood where he suspected the bunco man had his lair, and converse with the inmates without exciting any suspicions.

The peddler was a middle-aged Irishman—a sharp, shrewd fellow, like all of his class.

The detective was wise enough to comprehend that it would be best to allow such a man to know just what kind of a game he wanted to play; so he briefly explained that he was anxious to locate a party who had taken refuge in a farm in a certain neighborhood and needed his aid.

A bargain was soon made, and it was arranged that the detective should come from New York by the first train in the morning, and then the wagon would start.

"It's a mighty foino idea ye have struck out, sur," the Irishman declared, "an' if ye don't succeed in nailing your man, it is because he isn't to the fore!"

"Yes, I think the scheme will work," the New Yorker replied.

Then Ridley, resuming his seat in the rattle-trap, was driven to the depot, where he took a train to the city, which, as it happened, he was just in time to catch.

The untiring tracer was on the track.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRISONER.

No one came near the unfortunate girl, shut up in the wretched cellar, which was as dreary as any of the dungeons which we read about in the stories of the dark ages, until the red-faced woman made her appearance with the prisoner's supper.

And the woman was astonished when she made an examination to find that the girl had not touched the lunch which she had left on the occasion of her previous visit.

"Sakes alive!" the woman exclaimed, "you hain't eaten a morsel!"

"I hain't any desire for food."

"Well, I know the lunch was kinder betwixt and between, for, I s'pose, you had a good dinner, and it wasn't really time for supper, but you ought to be hungry now, for it is nigh onto eight o'clock."

"I don't think I care to eat anything," the girl replied.

"Oh, but you must, you know, you must eat something, no matter whether you care for it or not!" the woman declared.

"There ain't any sense in your starving yourself to death, you know," she argued.

"You ain't condemned to a life-long imprisonment, you understand," continued the woman.

"If you thought that you were going to stay in this place for the term of your natural life, then there might be some sense in your giving way to despair, and making up your mind that you might as well starve yourself to death."

"But you will not have to stay here, you understand."

"It all depends upon yourself," she urged in the wheedling tones which she had formerly used.

"If you are disposed to be sensible, and give up these delusions, there isn't any earthly reason why you can't get out of here in mighty short order."

"Have you any idea when the lawyer will come?" the girl asked.

"He has been sent for," the woman replied. "And I suppose he will get here some time to morrow."

"Well, that is not so long to wait," the girl remarked with an air of resignation.

"Yes, yes, you are right about that, the time will soon pass away."

"And I have arranged things with the doctor too so as to make you a little more comfortable," the woman continued.

"I am very much obliged to you, I am sure."

"You see the doctor here is an old man, a German, as you might judge from his name, and he is a dreadful crank about some things."

"From the report which was made to him he got the idea that you were inclined to be violent, and he fancied that we would have a great deal of trouble with you."

"Is it possible?" the girl exclaimed in amazement.

"Oh, yes, and that is the reason why you were put into this place, which we reserved for violent and dangerous patients."

"Why, how could any one make such a mistake about me?"

"I don't know; these doctors take all sorts of cranky ideas into their heads sometimes."

"But I told the doctor that you were all right and seemed to be as quiet as a lamb."

"I am sure I am not violent, and I do not see how any one could get the idea that I was."

"That is just what I said to the doctor, and I told him that I would like to make you a little more comfortable if I could."

"Thank you! you are very kind!" the girl exclaimed, gratefully.

"So I have got a cot for you with the proper bedding, a table and a rocking-chair, and the things will make you a deal more comfortable."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"But you must give me your word though that you will not impose on my kindness by using the things to help you to escape—not try to batter down the door, or anything of that kind."

"Oh, no, I will not!" the girl replied immediately. "I give you the promise freely, for I am sensible enough to comprehend that any attempt of that kind on my part could only result in failure."

"That is right!" the woman declared.

"You never said a truer word in your life!" she continued.

"If you should try to escape, and squeal, and fight, I would have to put you in a strait jacket, and clap a gag in your mouth, although there isn't any danger that any one would hear you excepting those in the building, for there isn't a house within half a mile."

"This is a lonely spot, and that is just why the doctor picked it out for his sanitarium, as he calls it."

"Gottlieb's Retreat for the Insane in the Pines," that is what the doctor named it, and as we have some mighty violent patients to handle sometimes, it is very desirable that we shouldn't have neighbors near who would be disturbed by their screeches."

A shudder stirred the girl's slender form as she listened to the words.

Into what a dreadful snare had she fallen, to be confined in a mad-house and imprisoned in the dungeon reserved for the dangerous lunatics!

"Now I will bring in the things," the woman continued.

"You have given me your word, remember, that you will not try to escape!"

"Yes, I will not make the attempt."

"It wouldn't do you a mite of good!" the woman declared.

"And if you tried any game of the kind, we would have to use some awful harsh measures with you, and I don't want to do that if I can help myself."

Then the woman opened the door and lugged in the cot bed, a small table, and a rocking-chair.

For bedding there were a couple of blankets and a pillow.

"Of course, it isn't possible to make a den of this sort into a comfortable room, no matter what you put into it," the woman observed, as she arranged the things.

"But these articles will make it a little easier for you."

"You will not have to stay here long, though, if you will get rid of your delusions," the woman remarked, as she departed.

The girl forced herself to eat something, and then slowly enough the hours passed away.

In the morning the woman came with the prisoner's breakfast.

"The lawyer will be here at noon," she announced.

CHAPTER XVI.

A PROPOSITION.

It was a long and weary wait for the unfortunate Jeanette, but at last the lawyer made his appearance.

Lysander Kankershaw was a man of sixty, or thereabouts, large in stature, portly in form, and with one of those smooth, oily faces, which, in this uncertain world, so often cover a deceitful heart.

He came, smiling, into the cellar and beamed on the girl as though he was the dearest friend that she had.

"Is this your work, Mr. Kankershaw?" the girl exclaimed, rising and confronting the old lawyer with a face full of indignation.

"No, no, bless you, my child, no! I had nothing to do with it!" he replied with an unruffled face.

"But it was you who introduced me to the man who brought me to this terrible place!" Jeanette declared.

"Ah, yes, that is very true, but that was all arranged by Mr. Hubberton," the lawyer explained in his smooth, oily way.

"I assure you, my dear young lady, that I hadn't any idea of what he intended to do."

"When I called upon him and explained your case, he requested me to give him two or three days to think the matter over, as I told you, if you remember?"

The girl nodded assent.

"Then, when I called on him again, he said he would like to see you personally and have a talk about the matter, and as he was going down to his farm in Jersey he would send a messenger to bring you to him."

"And that messenger conducted me to this dreadful place!" Jeanette exclaimed.

"Yes, I understand all about it now, but I didn't until the mischief was done," the wily old lawyer declared in his smoothest tones.

"After you had departed, Mr. Hubberton sent for me, said he had caused inquiries to be made about you, and the report made to him was that you were mentally weak and not responsible for what you did."

"Oh, what a dreadful falsehood!" the girl cried indignantly.

"Who could have said such a thing about me?"

"Well, I will tell you frankly, my dear young lady, that I had my suspicions in regard to your sanity, for the tale you told was such a strange one that it did not seem possible it could be the truth."

"But you did not say anything to me to indicate that you had any doubts in regard to the matter," the girl replied.

"Very true; and that was because I feared if I did so you might become excited," the wily old lawyer explained.

"But, as I told you, I had my doubts about the matter, and so, when I arranged to have a second interview with you, I had a doctor friend of mine in the next room, with the door ajar, so he could hear all the conversation."

"After you departed, I asked his opinion about the matter, and he said there was no doubt in his mind that your brain was affected and you were subject to delusions."

"But it seems to me that you did not treat me fairly by keeping me in ignorance of what you thought."

"My dear young lady, I fancied I was doing it for the best."

"Although you were a stranger to me, I took a great interest in you, and I was anxious to do all I could for your welfare."

"It was my idea to keep the thing quiet," he continued.

"Apparently, you had a very strong case, and I thought that if I handled the matter carefully I might be able to compromise the matter with Mr. Hubberton so that I could get enough money to secure a comfortable support for you for the rest of your life."

"But as my father's heir I am entitled to over fifty thousand dollars!" the girl declared.

"Ah, yes; if you could succeed in proving your case in a court of law you might be able to recover some such sum."

"But you must take into consideration, my dear young lady, that you must contend with a man who has plenty of money, occupies a high position in the world's esteem, and has a large number of powerful friends, men who wield a vast amount of influence."

"You are contending against fearful odds, but, by the way, allow me to beg you to be seated, for I have a proposition to make to you, and the discussion will take some time."

"Yes," said the girl, resuming her seat in the rocking-chair, her face dark with anxiety.

The old gentleman seated himself on the end of the cot bed.

"There, now we can talk at our ease," he remarked.

Jeanette nodded assent.

"Now to give you an idea of how difficult it is going to be for a person situated as you are to struggle with such a man as this rich banker, let me tell you how this doctor acted whom I asked to give me his ideas in regard to your condition."

"Of course, you told your story so that he became possessed of all the particulars, and what does he do but post off immediately to Mr. Hubberton and reveal all the particulars to him."

"That doctor was a villain!" the girl declared, indignantly.

"Ah, well, I believe he is not particularly prosperous, and I presume that the banker gave him fifty or a hundred dollars for his information."

"It was a shameful proceeding!"

"Yes, very sharp practice, indeed; no doubt about that," the old lawyer admitted.

"And as soon as the banker got these particulars he formed a scheme immediately."

"He got the doctor to give a certificate that you were insane, then he fooled me by saying that he wanted to have a talk with you down on his farm in Jersey."

"I fell into the trap at once, for I supposed he was anxious to propose a compromise to you, and so I gladly made arrangements for you to go."

"Yes, I went without a thought that I was being led into a snare."

"Thanks to the doctor's certificate Mr. Hubberton had no difficulty in getting you admitted as a patient to this asylum."

"He explained to the doctor in charge that you were a poor girl who had become possessed of the unfortunate delusion that you were a niece of his, and entitled to a good deal of money, and as he had become interested in your case he had made up his mind to see that you were comfortably taken care of for the rest of your life, so he made an arrangement to pay the doctor a liberal sum per week for your board."

"You see, my dear young lady, how cunningly he arranged the matter," the old lawyer continued.

"If you told the attendants, or the doctor, your story, they would take it to be a sure sign that you were crazy, and then he made it to the doctor's interest to believe that you were out of your mind, for if the doctor came to the conclusion that you were all right he would lose a good-paying boarder."

"Oh, this is so utterly monstrous!" Jeanette exclaimed.

"I would not have believed it to be possible that there was such wickedness in the world!"

"Well, really, the story you tell is such a strange one that it is not odd that all of us who have heard it should be inclined to think that your head is not just right."

"It cannot be possible that you believe such a thing?" Jeanette exclaimed in amazement.

"Well, really, you know, I haven't any professional experience in such matters," the old lawyer remarked, with an owl-like look and a grave shake of his head.

"If I had met you under ordinary circumstances, I don't suppose I would have mistrusted that there was anything the matter with you, but I am not an expert about this sort of thing, and so am not qualified to judge."

"It is a monstrous lie!" the girl declared, indignantly. "For I am in full possession of my senses, and it does not seem possible to me that it can be true that all you people believe to the contrary!"

"Well, as far as that goes, my dear young lady, the best proof that I can give that we are all honest and sincere in our belief is your presence in this lunatic asylum," the old lawyer replied in his bland way.

"Ah, but you are all in a dreadful plot against me!" Jeanette exclaimed, excitedly.

"You know that my story is true, and you want to cheat me out of the money which is justly due me!"

"Ah, my dear young lady, how can it be possible for you to give utterance to such an unjust suspicion!" the old lawyer declared with a sorrowful look, and he shook his head in a melancholy way.

"But I believe that it is the truth!" the girl retorted.

"Ah, yes, and the very fact that you allow a fearful and monstrous suspicion of this kind to take possession of your mind is almost absolute proof that your wits are disordered."

"No, no, that is not the truth!" Jeanette cried, very much excited.

"Now, really, my dear young lady, you must endeavor to compose yourself, or else

something dreadful will really happen!" the old lawyer remarked in a soothing way.

"Try and compose yourself, and look at the situation as it really is," he continued.

"Do you think that if you had an opportunity to tell this suspicion of yours to the world that you could make any one believe that three such men of standing as Mr. Hubberton, the eminent banker, who is worth two or three million dollars, a physician of the high standing of Doctor Abraham Gardner, or a man of my professional reputation would engage in any such conspiracy as you suggest?"

The girl wrung her hands in a helpless way.

"Oh, no, I don't suppose that anybody would believe me, but I feel convinced that it is the truth," she declared.

"My dear young lady, I shall not allow myself to become angry, nor will I say anything harsh to you, although I will admit that I am dreadfully wounded by this terribly unjust and monstrous accusation.

"But, of course, I must make allowances for the condition of your mind.

"I am your friend, though, my dear young lady, and I am disposed to do all I can for you in this matter, as I will speedily prove to you."

"Yes?" said Jeanette, and surveyed the old lawyer with an expression on her face which plainly showed she had her doubts in regard to this.

"Oh, yes; as soon as Mr. Hubberton sent for me and revealed what he had done, I ventured to remonstrate.

"I told him that I thought your case was a mild one, and that if you returned to the Western town where you were brought up, there, among your friends, you would speedily recover from this delusion, if you had sufficient money to support yourself for a few years.

"Mr. Hubberton, you must understand, is a very prompt man and comes speedily to a decision.

"He reflected over the matter for a moment, and then he said:

"Perhaps you are right; anyway I am willing to risk it. If you can make an arrangement with the girl to sign off all these fabulous claims of hers and execute a legal release, taking her oath, too, on the Bible that she will never trouble me again, I will give her five thousand dollars!"

"And that, my dear young lady, seems to me to be an extremely liberal offer," the old lawyer remarked in conclusion.

"Oh, yes, extremely liberal!" Jeanette exclaimed, in supreme contempt.

"Five thousand dollars in place of fifty thousand!"

"Yes, but you will get this five thousand while the chances are great that, if you attempted to make a fight for the fifty thousand, you wouldn't get a penny."

"It is a conspiracy! there is no doubt about it!" the girl exclaimed, angrily.

"You strong men have combined to rob a poor, helpless girl of her inheritance, but there is a just Heaven which will not permit such a monstrous scheme to succeed!" she continued.

"I have faith that Providence will not be deaf to my prayers, and therefore I will not sacrifice my heritage!"

The lawyer rose, and shook his head sadly.

"I see that the delusions which have taken possession of you are too strong at present to permit you to listen to reason.

"In time, though, you may change your mind, and when you do you can send for me."

And then the old lawyer took his departure.

"Oh, Heaven have pity on me!" Jeanette cried.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BANKER.

AFTER leaving the cellar, where the hapless girl was confined, the old lawyer ascended the stairs and knocked at the door at the head of the flight.

All possible precautions had been taken to keep the girl from escaping.

The door which led into the cellar was guarded by a spring lock, and another one was on the door at the head of the stairs, so

that if the girl, by a sudden rush, should succeed in getting through the lower door upon the entrance of a visitor the upper one would bar her progress.

The red-faced woman came in answer to the lawyer's knock, and opened the door for him.

Curbstone Charley was in the room engaged in a game of cards with Billy Blister, whose face still plainly showed that he had been in a fight where he had been roughly handled.

The "Kid" had, of course, related the particulars of his adventure with the "dude" to Curbstone Charley.

But that worthy was not at all alarmed about the matter notwithstanding his acuteness.

There is a very old saying, coming from the ancient Romans, that "even the great Jove nods sometimes," meaning to imply that the smartest persons may make a mistake.

And in this instance the saying was apt as far as the bunco-man was concerned.

The explanation that the conqueror of the Kid had given about losing his way in the pines, and that he was following the other wagon in order to find his way out, seemed to be a reasonable one, and Curbstone Charley had no doubt it was correct.

The bunco-man consoled with Billy Blister upon the sad mistake which he had made when he picked the stranger up as an "easy mark," as the sporting-men say.

But in reality, though, Curbstone Charley was delighted that his pal had been thrashed in such a complete manner, for the Kid had an idea that he was a champion with his fists, and as the bunco-man was "no good" in that line the other was accustomed to bullying him once in a while in a way that he did not like.

"How did you find her?" Curbstone Charley inquired.

"She is obstinate at present, but not at all inclined to come to terms," the old lawyer replied.

"Well, it is almost too soon to expect her to weaken," the woman observed.

"Just you wait, though, until she has put in a week in that cellar, and then see if some of the obstinacy isn't taken out of her," she continued with a hoarse laugh.

"Take all possible care of the girl," you know, for I don't want her to be injured, although I presume that she will fret herself sick, but it cannot be helped."

"Oh, you can depend upon my taking the best of care of her, and I will keep at her all the time, too, about how foolish she is not to do as you wish."

"Yes, that is a good idea," the old lawyer observed with an approving nod.

"And if she shows any signs of weakening I will notify you immediately," the woman remarked.

"Yes, do not fail to do so," the old lawyer questioned.

"It is only a question of time, of course," he continued.

"It may take only a few days or she may hold out for a week or two, but in the end she is certain to give in."

"Oh, yes, there ain't any doubt about that!" the woman exclaimed.

"I reckon I am about as strong-minded as any of them, but I will be hanged if I should like to be shut up in that cellar!" she declared.

"It is not a pleasant place," Kankershaw observed with a crafty smile.

"You bet your life it isn't! I think that if I was shut up there for two or three days, with only my thoughts for my companions, that I would be mighty apt to have the horrors the worst way," the woman declared.

"Very likely," the old lawyer responded.

"Well, I shall be over to Long Branch at the West End Hotel for the next week, so you will not have any trouble to get at me if the girl shows any signs of weakening."

"All right!" the woman replied.

And then Mr. Kankershaw took his departure.

He had driven over in a hired buggy, and now proceeded to return.

"She is a stubborn little piece of humanity," he mused, as he drove on over the sandy road and in amid the gloomy pines.

"But there is not much doubt that a few days in that horrible cellar will either drive

her to accept the offered terms, or else make a lunatic of her in reality.

"But if she does lose her wits, it is not my fault," he continued, in a reflective way. "No, no, I am not responsible for it, for I am only carrying out Hubberton's instructions.

"He is the man who constructed the scheme; it is all his doing from beginning to end.

"I am but a tool, and an extremely unwilling accomplice, too, but I cannot help myself, for I am in the banker's power, and so am obliged to do his bidding or else suffer, and as I am not of the stuff of which martyrs are made, I have gone in to assist him in his devilish plans."

And then the old lawyer shook his head in a melancholy way.

His reflections were not pleasant ones.

He returned the carriage to the stable upon reaching Long Branch, and then proceeded to Mr. Hubberton's cottage.

The banker had come to the summer city to enjoy a holiday, and was sitting on the veranda of his cottage, smoking a cigar, when the lawyer came.

General Godfrey Hubberton, "the eminent banker," as the newspaper men were wont to term him, was a man of sixty, with snow-white hair and equally white elaborate mutton-chop side-whiskers, worn in the English style, but these were about the only evidence of age that he displayed, for he had a round, really youthful looking face, and his portly form was that of a man of forty.

He was one of the jolly kind of men who went through life with a smile upon his lips.

The world at large recognized him as a sharp, shrewd business man, always pleasant and agreeable, even when he had unpleasant duties to perform.

But for all that, men who had intimate business relations with the banker knew that his good nature was all on the surface, for in business transactions he was inclined to be hard and merciless.

In the struggle for wealth he ruthlessly trampled upon all who came in his way, and had no mercy for the weak and helpless.

There was a half a dozen rocking-chairs on the veranda, and as Mr. Kankershaw came up, the banker invited him to be seated, then tendered a cigar.

"You can speak freely, if you are careful to use a moderate tone," the banker observed, after the old lawyer was seated and had his cigar lighted.

"Ah, yes, of course."

The pair were seated at the eastern corner of the veranda, which ran around both the front and the sides of the house, so they could easily detect the approach of any one from either direction.

"Well, I saw her and made known the proposition," the lawyer continued.

"She was not inclined to be at all reasonable, I suppose?"

"No, not at all, and used some very harsh language in regard to a conspiracy."

"Well, that was very natural for her under the circumstances, and it is not to be wondered at," the banker remarked with a laugh, as though he considered the matter to be a good joke.

"I am afraid that we will have considerable trouble in bringing her to an agreement."

"Oh, no! that is where you make a mistake!" the banker exclaimed in an off-hand manner.

"By the way, you are an old bachelor, I believe, Kankershaw?" he said, abruptly.

"Yes, that is correct," the lawyer replied, rather surprised by the speech.

"Then you don't know as much about the female sex as you might."

"Well, although I am not a married man, yet I have had considerable experience with women."

"My dear fellow that doesn't count!"

"Until a man is married, and lives day in and day out with the one woman, he cannot possibly get a chance to study them in a complete and systematic manner."

"Well, perhaps there is a deal of truth in that," the old lawyer observed, reflectively.

"My dear Kankershaw, I know that it is the truth.

"I have been married three times, and

thus, having had the opportunity to study three women, I know what I am talking about."

"Yes, I presume so."

"I know just how this thing will work!" the banker declared.

"At first she will make a most violent 'kick,' as the boys say.

"Probably make up her mind that she would rather die in the cellar than yield, but after a week or so she will break down, and then will be glad enough to come to terms."

"Yes, I should certainly think so."

"No doubt about it in my mind."

The appearance of Mrs. Hubberton in the door of the cottage interrupted the conversation at this point.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CARRYING OUT THE PLOT.

MR. KANKERSHAW rose and saluted the lady with a low bow as she approached.

"Allow me to compliment you upon your improved appearance," the old lawyer remarked.

"This trip to the seaside has certainly done you good, for you look a great deal better than you did when I last saw you in the city."

"Ah, you are a sad flatterer I am afraid, Mr. Kankershaw," the lady remarked as she took a chair by the side of her husband.

"Oh, no, madam! It is the truth, believe me!" the old lawyer responded with another bow as he resumed his seat.

"There isn't any doubt that the sea-air has done you good," the banker observed.

"And, although I have only been here for a couple of days, I feel decidedly better already."

The conversation was here interrupted by the appearance of the banker's daughter, Miss Magdalene, in her village cart.

She had got into the vehicle at the stable, and was now proceeding for a drive.

The young lady was some twenty-two or three years old, and took after her father in having a round, red face and a dumpy form.

As Mrs. Hubberton had remarked, in speaking about the girl to Fitz Gerald, she was not a beauty, being decidedly plain, but she looked as though she might be extremely good-natured.

The road to the street passed within ten feet of the part of the veranda where the three sat, and as the girl drove slowly by, she nodded and smiled.

"Take care that that fiery, untamed steed don't run away with you!" the banker exclaimed in his jolly way.

The aforesaid steed was a little cream-colored, pot-bellied pony, a stout little beast enough, but about the last horse in the world to so far forget himself as to run away.

The girl laughed, displaying an elegant set of teeth, about the only beauty which she possessed.

"Oh, there isn't any danger of Romeo running away!" she declared.

"Why, as I was driving to Ocean Grove yesterday the train came right alongside of him, and although he is mortally afraid of the engines, the best he could do was to break into a funny sort of a gallop."

"Are you going to Ocean Grove to-day?" Mrs. Hubberton asked.

"No, I am going to take my favorite drive in among the pines," the girl responded.

"I enjoy getting away in the solitude. There are no houses, and sometimes I don't see a wagon, or even a single soul, from the time I go in until I come out."

"Take care that somebody don't carry you off!" the banker exclaimed.

"You are an extremely attractive girl, you know, Mag, and some of these country fellows may take it into his head some time to clope with you without going through the formality of asking your opinion about the matter."

"Ah, you are always joking, papa!" the girl declared as she drove away.

Leaving the party on the veranda to continue their conversation, which is of no interest to the reader, we will follow the girl.

As Mrs. Hubberton had explained to the Englishman, the banker's daughter had selected a particular route in the pines over which she usually drove every other day.

As the banker's wife had said, this dumpy, unattractive girl was inclined to be romantic, and in her lonely drives in the pines she indulged in day-dreams of a young, handsome, dashy fellow, who would one day lay siege to her heart, solely because he had fallen desperately in love with her, and cared not whether she was rich or poor.

And during this present drive Miss Magdalene was allowing her thoughts to dwell on the Englishman, Fitz Gerald.

Miss Hubberton had, in an artful way, contrived to get the girl interested in the stranger.

He was a younger brother, the scion of one of the noblest houses in England and one of these days would inherit a vast estate and a great title, so the banker's wife declared.

Magdalene had seen the gentleman, but had not been introduced to him, a fact which annoyed her.

"Humph! if I was a beauty now he would seek my society, but as I am an ugly little wretch, he isn't anxious to know me!" she had exclaimed to her step-mother.

"Oh, you are not ugly!" Miss Hubberton responded. "It is just sheer accident that he hasn't been introduced to you."

"You are not as beautiful as some of the girls, it is true, but you have good eyes and beautiful teeth; then, too, you are always good-natured, and men like jolly girls."

"And not one of them dresses any better than I do!" the banker's daughter had averred.

"Which is true; so I am sure if Mr. Fitz Gerald made your acquaintance he would be pleased with you."

The artful way in which Mrs. Hubberton had managed the matter made a deep impression on Magdalene, and as soon as she got deep within the pines, she gave herself up to pleasant day-dreams, the central figure of which was the dashing Englishman, Fitz Gerald.

From these agreeable reflections she was doomed to be rudely roused.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOOTPADS.

SHE had just driven around a bend in the road, the pony was proceeding at a walk, for the girl was so occupied in her agreeable reflections that she allowed "Romeo" to go ahead at his own sweet will.

And the horse, when he was allowed to have any chance in the matter, invariably walked.

Suddenly two men made their appearance from amid the pines, and advanced into the center of the road, only about ten feet in front of the horse, and Romeo, who was always glad of an excuse to stop, immediately halted.

Magdalene gazed at the men in surprise.

They looked like farm-hands, being dressed in rough clothes, but they had big slouch hats pulled down over their eyes.

From under the hats came loose masses of dark hair, and all the lower part of their faces were hidden by bushy black beards.

The girl was no fool, and being gifted with remarkably good eyesight, at the second glance she conjectured that the men had on wigs and false beards, and that these were assumed for the purpose of disguising themselves, as it was not possible to get a good look at their features.

The girl took the alarm immediately.

She had her pocket-book with her, containing quite a little sum of money, twenty-five or thirty dollars, and then she wore valuable jewelry.

If the men were robbers it did not seem possible for her to escape without the loss of her valuables.

She was all alone in the lonely pines, not a house within a mile, and it was certain that if she cried for assistance no one would be apt to hear the alarm.

Her only chance of salvation was that some carriage might come along, but her experience on the lonely roads had taught her there was but little chance of that happening, for it was but seldom that she ever saw another vehicle from the time she entered the pines until she came out.

No, if the men intended to rob her, there

was almost no hope that anything would happen to prevent them from carrying out their purpose.

"Have you got the time of day with you, miss?" one of the men called out in a hoarse voice.

At first the girl was inclined to answer no, but in an instant she reflected that the chain of her watch was plainly perceptible, and it would not be of much use for her to attempt to deny the truth.

And oh! how angry she felt, for the watch was an elegant piece of jewelry, with little diamonds inset in it, and with the chain, had cost two hundred dollars.

"No, I haven't got the time with me—that is, not the exact time," she replied, evasively.

"Oh, I think any kind of time will do for us!" the stranger exclaimed with a hoarse chuckle.

"Hey, Jim, what do you say to that?" he inquired of his companion.

"Oh, yes, we ain't particular, lady!" the other ruffian replied.

"Any kind of time will suit us," he continued.

"But what we are more particular about just now," the fellow added, "is whether you have got the money to pay your toll."

"My toll!" the girl exclaimed.

"Yes, your toll!" the second ruffian responded.

"Mebbe you didn't know that this has been made a toll-road, and that me and my pal here have got the job of collecting the money."

"No, I certainly did not know it," the banker's daughter replied.

There was no doubt in her mind now about the matter.

The men intended to rob her, and, as far as she could see, there was not the slightest chance for her to escape.

If the pony had been a high-spirited, mettlesome horse she might have applied the whip to him and made the attempt to escape by riding over the ruffians, but with such a sluggish little beast as Romeo there was no chance of doing anything of the kind.

"Come, lady, we don't want to hurry you, but you might as well hand over your pocket-book, so we can collect the toll, first as last!" the first ruffian exclaimed.

"Yes, and while you are about forking over the pocket-book, you may as well give us all that nice jewelry," the other footpad exclaimed.

"My jewelry!" the girl cried.

"That is what I said!" the ruffian responded.

"Do you mean to rob me?"

"Lordy! what do you take us for?" the first ruffian exclaimed, with a hoarse laugh.

"Why, we wouldn't do sich a thing for the world!" cried the other, and then he too laughed loudly.

"Oh, no, my pretty young lady; we are only going to take the jewelry so as to keep it safe for you."

"The money in your pocket-book is to pay your toll, and for fear that you might be robbed in these here lonely woods, we will take care of your jewelry for you, and if you will leave us your address, we will have it sent to you by Express," and then both the fellows laughed hoarsely.

"Oh, you mean to rob me, of course, and as I am all alone, helpless in your power, I will be obliged to submit; but you are making a great mistake, for you will be sure to be caught!" the girl cried, endeavoring to present a bold front, although she felt extremely like bursting into a flood of tears.

"Well, miss, that is one of the risks of the business, you see," the first ruffian remarked. "And we have got to take our chances on that."

"Tain't all smooth sailing in any business, you know, and we have to put up with some drawbacks in this game, like in any other."

"You hand over the valuables, and we'll run the risk of getting nabbed by the police!" the other ruffian exclaimed.

And just as the girl was about to comply with the demand—reluctantly, of course, and sorely against her will—around the bend in the road rode a horseman.

At the first glance, the rider—who was the Englishman, Howard Fitz Gerald, seemed to comprehend what was going on.

"What are you about, you scoundrels!" he cried, impetuously.

Out came the footpads' revolvers, and they blazed away at the horseman.

But in defiance of their fire he rode at them.

The discharge of the pistols, right in his face, scared the fat pony into a runaway for once in his life.

He wheeled around with so much quickness that Magdalene was pitched out headlong into the road, and she bounded through the air with all the ease, but none of the grace, of a circus-tumbler doing a famous leap.

After discharging their revolvers the ruffians took to their heels and disappeared amid the pines, where it was not possible for the horseman to follow them.

So he returned to Miss Magdalene's assistance.

Although that young lady had bounced down on the sand with considerable force, yet, owing to the soft nature of the soil, she had not received any material damage beyond a severe shaking up, and the injury done to her modesty when she reflected that in her, by no means graceful, trip through the air, she had displayed a liberal amount of the fat legs with which Dame Nature had gifted her.

"My dear Miss Hubbardton, are you hurt?" the Englishman inquired, anxiously, as he dismounted by her side.

Miss Magdalene had risen to a sitting posture and was employed in vigorously pulling down her skirts, so as to hide her lower limbs from the gaze of the gentleman, blushing furiously the while.

"No, I don't think I have sustained any serious injury," she responded.

"I am more frightened than hurt, although I feel a little bit stunned and faint."

"I am so delighted to think that I was fortunate enough to be able to come to your aid," the gentleman declared with a gallant bow.

"And permit me to introduce myself, since there is no one at hand to perform the friendly office, and although I have been in the same company as yourself several times, yet I never happened to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, although I have been introduced to your step-mother, Mrs. Hubbardton."

"My name is Howard Fitz Gerald."

Again the gentleman bowed, and Magdalene acknowledged the salutation in a becoming manner.

"Yes, I have heard Mrs. Hubbardton speak of you," she remarked.

"She has a very great love for you apparently, and it was only last night that she told me that I really ought to make your acquaintance, for you were an extremely jolly girl."

And the Englishman smiled as though he considered that he had paid quite a compliment.

"Mrs. Hubbardton is a little prejudiced in my favor, I think."

"But permit me to assist you to rise," Fitz Gerald said, extending his hand.

"That is, if you think you have recovered sufficiently to be able to stand on your feet."

"Oh, yes, I think so," Magdalene replied.

"I feel a great deal better already."

"That is because the shock is passing away," the Englishman remarked.

Then he assisted the girl to rise, but after getting on her feet she was obliged to cling to his arm, for she had not recovered her strength.

"Lean on me, I beg my dear Miss Magdalene," the gentleman hastened to say, and as he spoke he passed his arm around her waist so as to afford support.

The girl really was so faint from the excitement that she was barely able to stand.

"It was dreadful," Magdalene declared.

"Yes; one would hardly have believed that the scoundrels would have dared to make such an attempt in broad daylight; but this is a lonely spot, and I suppose they thought that if you tried to give an alarm, no one would hear your cries."

"How fortunate it was for me that you happened to take this road."

"I am very glad indeed that I was able to come to your assistance."

"The miserable wretches would surely

have robbed me of all my valuables if you had not arrived just in time to interfere."

"Yes, it is likely that you would have been plundered, for the rascals were not disposed to retreat even when I made my appearance."

"But when you rushed at them they ran away fast enough, although they were armed with pistols and you were not," the girl remarked with an admiring glance at the gentleman.

"All rascals of this kind who attack unprotected women are arrant cowards at heart, and when they discovered that I wasn't afraid of them they took to their heels as fast as possible."

"A man doesn't have to be particularly brave to cope with miserable scoundrels of this sort," the Englishman remarked with the air of a man who was not disposed to think the matter amounted to much.

By this time Magdalene had recovered her strength and she said:

"I think I will be able to proceed now; I suppose I will have to walk home, for, from the way that Romeo galloped off it is not possible that he will stop until he reaches his stable."

"I can offer you the assistance of my arm," Fitz Gerald remarked, as he withdrew his arm from the waist of the girl, and, with a courtly bow tendered it to Magdalene.

"We are not over four or five miles from your cottage," he continued. "And by taking our time we will be able to walk that distance without any trouble."

"Of course it is not possible for you to ride my horse."

"Oh, I shall not mind the walk, although I am not a particularly good walker," Magdalene observed.

The Englishman took the rein of his horse with his disengaged arm, and the pair started.

As they proceeded they conversed upon various subjects, Fitz Gerald doing his best to make a favorable impression on the girl.

And in this he succeeded admirably, for the Englishman was a good conversationalist.

When the two arrived at the edge of the wood a surprise awaited them.

The pony had yielded to the temptation offered by the grass growing by the roadside and was busily engaged in cropping it.

"Your walk is ended," the Englishman remarked, as he assisted the girl into the carriage.

Then he mounted his horse and the two proceeded to Long Branch in company.

There was no denying that the plot had succeeded to perfection.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONSULTATION.

As soon as the young man-hunter, who called himself Bob Ridley, reached New York he hastened to the house of the veteran detective, Joe Phenix.

To those readers who have followed the fortunes of this marvelous sleuth-hound, in the series of tales which bear his name, it is not necessary to go into details in regard to Joe Phenix, but to others who know not the man, we will simply say that of all the man-hunters that the metropolis has ever known, this particular rogue-catcher stands at the head.

Bob Ridley was fortunate enough to find the veteran at home.

The young man explained the case at length, and the veteran detective listened with a great deal of interest.

"It was just by accident, of course, that I happened to get on the track," the young man said in conclusion.

"But, knowing that Curbstone Charley was a thorough-paced scoundrel, the moment I saw him in company with a young and innocent looking girl I jumped at once to the conclusion that he was up to some mischief."

"There is no doubt in my mind that this opinion is a correct one," the sagacious man-hunter remarked in a reflective way.

"And the fellow is evidently up to some deep game—something different from his usual banco-tricks," Joe Phenix continued.

"Yes, that is what I thought," Bob Ridley observed.

"I should judge from the description which you have given that he has been employed by some one to decoy the girl away, but for what purpose it is not possible to say; it is certain though that no good is meant to the girl."

"Oh, there is some rascality connected with the affair, of course!" the young man exclaimed.

"You may be sure of that if a fellow like Curbstone Charley has a finger in the pie."

"Yes, that is as certain as anything can be," the veteran detective coincided.

"And the fact too that the men were on the watch to see that they were not followed, and took pains to intercept you, shows plainly that they were carrying on some kind of a game, for honest men, going about their own business, would not act in that way."

"That is true!"

"Your idea of going with the peddler is a good one, and I don't think there is much doubt but that you will be able to find this rascal."

"But how about Armitage?" the young man asked.

"I suppose Western explained to you how the fellow managed to make his escape from the train after he was safely nabbed?"

"Yes, the man is evidently a bold and desperate fellow, and it would not surprise me if we had considerable trouble in getting hold of him again."

"Did Western tell you how I anticipated that the man would make an effort to see me at the hotel?"

"Yes, he explained that Armitage appeared to be very highly impressed by the charms of the young lady, whose acquaintance he had made in such an unconventional manner," the veteran detective remarked with a smile.

"It is my idea that the charms of the money, which Armitage imagined the young lady had come to New York to get, was the attraction," the young sleuth declared.

"Oh, yes, I do not doubt that the fellow made up his mind there was a good chance for him to get hold of some cash without his being obliged to go to any great amount of trouble."

"He gave me particular instructions to go to this hotel, and it was my notion that as soon as he thinks it is safe he will endeavor to enter into communication with me."

"I think that supposition is a correct one," Joe Phenix observed, thoughtfully.

"Well, now the point is, if I go on this chase after Curbstone Charley, there must be some arrangements made to look after Armitage in case he either comes or sends to the hotel."

"Yes, that is important, of course, and I will attend to it myself," the veteran detective remarked.

"It happens, luckily, that the hotel keeper is an old acquaintance of mine, and when I explain this matter to him there isn't a doubt but what he will do all he can to aid me to capture the man."

"That is all right, then."

"Oh, yes; you can go ahead on the Curbstone Charley game, for I will see that the Armitage matter is looked after."

"In fact, I shall take pains to give my personal attention to the affair," the veteran detective continued. "For I am annoyed by the way in which this fellow slipped through Western's fingers, and I shall not be satisfied until I am able to clap the bracelets on him again."

"I think he is an extra smart rascal, and it will not be an easy job to trap him."

"Oh, yes; no doubt about that," Joe Phenix responded.

"If he is wise enough to avoid making a blunder, the odds are big that we will not catch him," the veteran man-hunter continued.

"But then again the odds are equally great that he will make some mistake, so as to give us a chance at him, for fully ninety per cent. of all the men who break the laws are certain to commit some blunder."

"If this was not a fact, few rascals would be caught, for as a rule all the chances are in their favor."

"That is the truth, and no mistake," Bob Ridley assented.

"And now in regard to this Curbstone

Charley business: as it happens, there is a chance to kill two birds with one stone, for three of the leading hotel-keepers at Long Branch have complained to me that their guests have been robbed in a most mysterious way."

"And all the leading hotels have private detectives, too."

"Yes, that is true; but a great number of these so called private detectives do not amount to much," Joe Phenix observed.

"I do not know anything about any one of the three detectives employed at these particular hotels," he continued.

"They are all strangers to me, and so I cannot tell whether the men are good or bad."

"But the fact that the guests of the hotels have been robbed, and the detectives have not been able to discover who did the work, would seem to show that the men are experts in their line," Bob Ridley argued.

"Yes, that is true," Joe Phenix assented.

"Well, judging from the accounts that the hotel keepers have given me in regard to these robberies, there is a very skillful gang of rascals concerned, and it will require some head-work to catch them."

"After you get through with Curbstone Charley you can turn your attention to this hotel business."

"All right, I will attend to it," the young detective replied.

"The guests of the West End have suffered more than the rest, so when you commence work you had better put up at that hotel."

"Very well, I will do so, and as soon as I am ready to go ahead I will advise you," Bob Ridley replied.

This ended the interview.

The young detective then went to his apartment—he had a room in Phenix's house, and assumed a disguise fit for the work in hand.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SEARCH.

THE change which the young sleuth-hound made in his appearance was a marvelous one.

The good-looking dude changed into a roughly-dressed youth whose dark complexion suggested that he had been born in a foreign clime.

Nine people out of ten, if questioned in regard to the boy's nationality, would have said, unhesitatingly, that he was an Italian.

The disguise was so perfect that even the most expert judge of character would have been deceived.

From the detective's house the disguised sleuth proceeded directly to the railway station, which he reached just in time to catch the last train.

When he arrived at his destination he went to the little hotel where the tin-peddler had his quarters.

The Irishman sat on the porch of the house, smoking a short black pipe.

"How you find yourself dis evening?" the Italian asked, speaking English with only a slight accent, as he took his seat by the side of the Irishman.

The peddler surveyed the new-comer for a moment, but the detective's disguise was so perfect that the man had not the slightest suspicion that he had ever seen the supposed Italian before.

"Ah, well, me bucko, I hav'n't anythin' to complain of, as far as I know," the Irishman remarked.

The disguised detective had taken a careful glance around as he ascended the steps, and so ascertained that there wasn't anybody in the neighborhood who could play the eavesdropper.

There was a saloon in the basement of the hotel, and all the loungers were congregated there.

"You see I have come all a-ready to start out with you in da morning," the Italian announced to the utter surprise of his companion.

The Irishman stared at the Italian for a moment.

"Is it to go with me, you m'ane?" he asked.

"Yes, so it was al. arranged, you know," the disguised detective replied.

"I do not a-look as I did, but I am the man all the a same!"

"Begob! it is wonderful!" the Irishman declared. "I never would have known you in the world!"

"I am dealing with some smart 'chaps, and it is my game not to have them spot me, or else all the fat would be in the fire."

"Yis, yis, I k n understand that, but I wouldn't have belaved it to be possible that a man could be afther so transmogrifying himself, bedad!"

"If I could not do it I would not be fit for my business."

"True for yees!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"What is your name?"

"Michael Muldoon."

"Mine is John Giggio."

"Well, that is aisy to handle," the peddler remarked in a reflective way.

"But some of them I-talians have names that are regular jaw breakers," he continued.

"Some of them are so hard that divil a bit kin I twist my tongue around them, but Johnny now is n'ate and aisy, and sorra a taste of trouble will I have wid that."

"I had to introduce myself so that you would know who I was, but from now on I am Johnny, your helper, and be careful in speaking to me to bear that in mind, for there is no knowing who may be around to overhear our words," the disguised detective continued.

"Ah, yis, I understand!" the Irishman declared with a wise shake of the head.

"Don't ye be afeard about my letting the cat out of the bag," he continued.

"I am not the kind of man to be afther committing a blunder of that kind."

"Shore! I'm a firm belaver in the ould saying, 'a still tongue makes a wise head!'"

At this point the departure of the loungers in a body from the saloon gave warning that it was time that all good people were in bed.

The Irishman saw the landlord, arranged for a bed for his assistant, and then the two retired to rest.

The pair were up early in the morning, had breakfast, and then set out.

As they drove away the disguised detective explained to the peddler that, as it would only take about half an hour to reach the locality where he desired to prosecute his researches, there wasn't any need of being in a hurry.

"My birds are of the all night kind," he remarked.

"In the city they never go to bed until two or three in the morning, and so are late risers, and it is not likely that they will change their habits materially down here in the country."

"That's true, bedad."

"So we don't want to get on the ground until about ten o'clock."

"We can attend to business thin as we go along," Muldoon suggested.

The spy was agreeable, and so the programme was carried out.

The disguised detective directed the peddler which way to go, and, as fortune favored the venture, just as eleven o'clock came, the sleuth-hound had the satisfaction of seeing the distinguished professor of the bunco-game, Curbstone Charley, smoking a pipe on the stoop of a farm-house.

CHAPTER XXII.

A LIVELY STRUGGLE.

CURBSTONE CHARLEY had gone to the trouble of disguising himself, for, of course, a man dressed with the care and elegance which he always affected would be certain to excite a deal of attention in the midst of the pine barrens of New Jersey.

He was now attired in a well-worn suit, had on a 'hickory' shirt, and with an old straw hat pulled down over his brows, looked for all the world like a native.

"There is my mutton!" the detective remarked as he caught sight of the notorious New York crook.

The peddler's wagon was going at a slow pace, and was a good thousand feet from the house when the keen-eyed spy first saw the bunco-man.

"Bedad! it's lucky ye are!" the Irishman declared.

"Now, then, I propose to nail this fellow right away!" the spy announced.

"I don't know how many pals he has around, but it is my impression that he has only one man with him, and as I intend to raise considerable row when I tackle this fellow, it is probable that his pal will come to his assistance, and then I can bag both of them."

"And will ye be afther doing it all alone by yerself?" the Irishman inquired, in considerable astonishment.

"Yes, I think I can handle them," the disguised detective replied, in a careless tone, and, from the way in which he spoke, it would appear as if there wasn't any doubt in his mind about the matter.

"Say! is this all right? ye are a police officer, sure enough?" Muldoon asked, abruptly.

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that."

"And these min are rascals who ought to be behind the bars?"

"Yes, a tough old pair of crooks, and no mistake!"

"Be the howly poker, thin, I will be afther giving ye a hand if ye made it!" Muldoon exclaimed.

"All right! much obliged! But I have an idea that I can handle them myself without any trouble."

"But ye are not as big as yees might be," the Irishman remarked, with a distrustful look at the seemingly slight proportions of the youth.

"I'm no giant, nor even a heavyweight, but I pull down the beam at a hundred and thirty pounds good, and the man who 'stacks' up against me will have to know something of the manly art of self-defense, or else he will be apt to get the worst of it, even if he is as big as the side of a house."

The tone of confidence used by the apparent youth astonished the Irishman.

"Ah, well, mebbe it is all right—mebbe it is jist as you say," Muldoon remarked.

"You ought to be afther knowing, for I will go bail, from the way ye are going on, that this isn't the furst foime yees have gone afther yer man, but if the spalpeens are too much for yees I will take a hand in the fun, for the honor of the ould sod!"

By this time they had reached the farm-house gate, and the conversation ended.

The Irishman halted the horse, then both he and his companion descended to the ground.

The disguised detective advanced through the gateway toward the house, while the Irishman busied himself about the drawers in the back of the wagon as though he was going to get out some goods.

The bunco-man was not in the mood to be bothered by peddlers, and as soon as the supposed Italian boy got well within the yard of the farm-house he began to wave his hand as a signal for him to retire.

But all the attention that the boy paid to the signals was to grin in a good-natured way, still advancing.

"Get out, I say!" Curbstone Charley exclaimed, annoyed because his signals were disregarded.

"Are you blind, you blamed fool, you? Get out! I don't want any of your truck!"

Still the youth grinned and advanced.

The bunco-man rose, in a rage, put his pipe in his pocket, and shook his fist at the intruder.

"You blamed Dago! If you don't make tracks out of this I'll skin you alive!" Curbstone Charley yelled in a passion.

The boy was halted, fifty feet or so away from the bunco-man.

"Oho! are you a cat-skinner?" cried the supposed Italian, grinning more than ever.

This irritated the crook, for he hated Italians, and it galled him to think that one of the despised race should dare to "chaff" a man like himself.

"You miserable Dago whelp!" the bunco-man exclaimed. "If you don't get out of this I will show you in short order whether I am a cat-skinner or not!"

As he spoke he advanced toward the Italian.

The intruder immediately commenced to back toward the road, but he doubled up his fists and shook them in a defiant manner at the other.

"You come-a here I black-a your eyes!" he announced.

This speech enraged the crook, for like all of his tribe he prided himself upon being handy with his fists, and the idea that any "dirty Dago beggar" should threaten to black his eyes was too much for his patience.

"Oh, you will, will you?" Curbstone Charley cried.

"You are an impudent hound and what you need is a good hiding to knock some sense into you!"

"You talk a too much wid your mouth!" the Italian youth retorted, defiantly.

By this time he had reached the gateway, and there halted as though he intended to stand his ground.

The bunco-man was somewhat surprised by this action, for he had no idea that the boy would endeavor to "try conclusions" with him.

It is a well known fact that the Italians, as a rule, are "no good" when it comes to boxing.

Their favorite weapon in a fight being a knife, which they are usually prompt to use whenever they get into a quarrel.

Therefore it was no wonder that Curbstone Charley was amazed to see the Italian assume a pugilistic attitude.

"You young Dago whelp, do you think that you are a match for me?" the bunco-man exclaimed as he came within reaching distance of the Italian, and "squared off" at him like a champion boxer.

"Me a-show you pretty soon, you bet!" the youth replied in the most confident manner.

And then he made a demonstration as though he intended to knock the head of the bunco-man off in short order.

Curbstone Charley threw up his hands to guard against the attack, more and more astonished, for it was now plainly evident to him that the boy really had an idea that he was a fighter.

And then came a movement on the part of the supposed Italian which took the bunco-man completely by surprise.

The attack which Curbstone Charley hastened to guard against was a feint only, for the moment that the bunco-man threw himself in position to ward off the coming blows, the Italian, with wonderful quickness, spun around like a top, his right fist extended, and this fist caught Curbstone Charley under the ear with the most astonishing force.

The bunco-man threw up his hands and went down all in a heap.

His antagonist had worked the "pivot" blow on him, and the crook was "knocked out."

From the kitchen door Billy Blister and his wife, the termagant Sally, witnessed the downfall of their pal.

Their surprise was great, for they hadn't a doubt but what the bunco-man would "warm" the Dago without difficulty.

But when they saw their pal felled to the earth, going down as though he had been shot, their rage knew no bounds.

And the speedy manner in which the Italian had disposed of the bunco-man satisfied the pair that he was a dangerous foe.

So when they rushed to avenge the defeat of their pal, The Kid seized a stout stick from the wood pile, which was close at hand, and the woman armed herself with a pitchfork which happened to be standing near the kitchen door.

With loud cries of mingled rage and defiance the pair ran toward the gate.

The Irishman, who had been hugely delighted by the ease with which his assistant had disposed of his assailant, judged that it was time he came to the aid of his companion when he saw that the man and woman had provided themselves with weapons.

The peddler always went armed with a revolver, for in his journeying in the country the pistol was necessary for his protection against the farm-house dogs, who were sometimes disposed to be offensively familiar.

Drawing his revolver, the Irishman hurried to the gateway.

But by the time he reached the open space, the assailants had been brought to a sudden halt.

When they came within a dozen yards of the Italian, the youth had whipped out a revolver, and, leveling it full at the pair, cried.

"Drop your weapons and throw up your

hands, or I will bore a hole right through you!"

There was no trace of the Italian now in the youth's speech.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CAPTURE.

NEVER was there a more astonished pair.

They had sense enough, though, to promptly obey the command, for there was something in the voice and manner of the speaker which warned them that he would not hesitate to be as good as his word if they kept on.

"Aha! ye murdering villains!" the Irishman exclaimed, flourishing his pistol as he came to the side of the Italian.

"It's glad I would be to let daylight right through yees!"

Then, before the astonished pair had recovered sufficiently from their surprise to utter a word, the youth produced two pairs of handcuffs.

The under jaws of Billy Blister and his wife dropped when they beheld the "bracelets."

Now, for the first time, they comprehended the nature of the trap into which they had fallen.

A "fly cop," as the crooks designate a detective, had tracked them to their lair.

"Mr. Muldoon, if you will have the kindness to snap these ornaments on the wrists of this pair of beauties, I will be much obliged to you," the sleuth-hound remarked.

"Certainly, sur; I will be glad to be afther having the chance to do that same!" the Irishman exclaimed, highly delighted at this pleasant state of affairs.

"This is strictly business, you understand," the disguised detective warned. "And if you are wise, you will submit quietly."

"I don't want you for a hanging offense, and so I would prefer not to lay you out with a bullet, if such a thing can be possibly avoided."

"Hav'n't you made some mistake?" Kid Blister asked, in a sullen way, as, with great reluctance, he held up his hands so the Irishman could snap the handcuffs on his wrists.

"Oh, no, I think not," the captor answered.

"I hav'n't done anything," the crook protested.

"Not a thing!" the woman asserted, vehemently. "I wish I may die if I have!"

By this time the pair were manacled.

Then the disguised detective pocketed his revolver, and producing another pair of handcuffs, snapped them on the wrists of Curbstone Charley, who was just beginning to recover consciousness.

By the time the manacles securely fettered him, the crook recovered his senses enough to rise to a sitting posture, and gaze around in a stupid way.

For a few moments he did not comprehend what had taken place, but soon the handcuffs on his wrists, and the fact that Blister and his wife wore similar ornaments revealed to him the truth.

He and they were in the hands of the law.

Despite this fact he put on a bold front.

"Say! what do you mean by this sort of thing?" the bunco-man exclaimed as he rose slowly to his feet.

"This here is a blamed outrage, and I'll have the law on you, as sure as you are born!" he blustered.

"Go slowly, Charley!" the disguised detective replied.

"You are in a bad box here," the spy continued. "And I fancy that you stand a good chance to get a little of the justice that these Jersey men pride themselves upon administering to all the New York crooks who are unlucky enough to get into the clutches of the law in this State."

"What do you mean by calling me Charley?" the crook demanded, staring hard at his captor, anxious to see if he could recognize him.

There was not a regular police detective in New York that the bunco-man did not know by sight.

He comprehended that his captor was disguised, but thought that if he was one of the

regular men he would be able to recognize him.

As it happened though, Joe Phenix's Mascot had never come in contact with Curbstone Charley in a professional way.

He knew that the bunco-man was one of the chief operators in his line, for he had been present in court when Curbstone Charley was on trial for a particularly clever piece of work, and so it was that, although the disguised detective knew the crook well enough, he was a stranger to the bunco-man.

"Oh, yes, your name is Charley, too!" the disguised detective declared.

"Charles Leverage, better known though as Curbstone Charley," he continued.

"And as a professor of the art of bunco I doubt if you have a superior in the country."

The crooks stared as they listened to the confident words of their captor.

"Well, you have certainly got the best of me on this deal," the crook replied. "For I will be hanged if I know you!"

"Oh, it isn't at all necessary that you should know who I am," the disguised detective remarked with a smile.

"You see I am a modest fellow, and I prefer to keep in the background as much as I can, but I will volunteer the explanation that I am on the staff of a man of whom you have doubtless heard—possibly know—Joe Phenix."

The crook gave vent to a low whistle, indicative of profound astonishment.

"Oh, yes, I know all about him!" he declared. "And he is the worst man in the business," Curbstone Charley continued.

"But, I say, what got the old man after me this time?" he asked, assuming an expression of innocent astonishment.

"This girl business," the disguised detective answered, with the air of a man who knew all about the matter.

The crook shook his head, while a blank look appeared on his countenance.

"Blamed if I know what you are talking about!" he declared.

"Oh, you are not willing to give the thing away!" the detective exclaimed in a brisk, business-like manner.

"I don't know anything to give away!" Curbstone Charley protested.

"Well, there isn't any use of wasting words over the matter, for the game is completely in my hands," the captor remarked.

"All I have to do is to go to the house and have a talk with the young lady, and then I will be put in possession of all the facts."

The bunco-man was an excellent actor and hid the rage which he felt upon hearing this announcement by assuming a surprised expression.

"Young lady!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, that is what I said," the disguised detective replied.

"Well, I reckon you will not find any young lady in that house!"

Billy Blister and his wife were quick to repeat this assertion.

The sleuth-hound smiled and shook his head.

"It isn't of any use, you know, for you three to give me any ghost story of that kind, for I know better!" he declared.

"I know that the young lady is in the house, all right, and though you may have her concealed, yet I think that the odds are about a thousand to one that I will be able to find her without any difficulty."

The crooks looked at each other, and then they shook their heads.

"You will not give it away, eh?" the disguised detective inquired.

"There isn't anything to give away!" Curbstone Charley responded, stoutly.

"If you don't believe me, go and look!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

RELEASED.

"THAT is exactly what I am going to do," the conquering sleuth-hound declared.

"Michael, you will have the kindness to keep your eyes on these three until I return?" he said to the Irishman.

"Oh, yis, I will be afther doing that same, sor!" the peddler replied.

"I know that it is a little out of your line,

but I think you will be able to do it all right."

"Yis, sor! Begob! ye may say that without the taste of a lie!"

"By the way, I will have to trouble you people for any keys that you may possess," the disguised detective remarked, abruptly.

The crooks looked at each other, and the sleuth-hound, who had his keen eyes upon them, noticed that both of the men gazed at the woman, while she tried her best to put on an air of unconcern.

Thereupon this shrewd and quick-witted observer at once jumped to the conclusion that it was the woman who had the keys.

"I presume that you have the young lady locked up," the spy remarked.

"It would not be a difficult matter for an expert bunco-man like you, Charley, to induce the girl to come with you to this lonely spot."

"You are just the man to get up a plausible fairy-story, but after you got the lady here it would not be so easy a matter for you to get her to remain, and so I think the odds are big that you have made her a prisoner."

"And you, madam, undoubtedly are attending to the girl," he continued, turning to Mrs. Blister, who glared at him with eyes full of rage.

"So oblige me with the keys."

"Hain't got none!" the woman exclaimed, angrily.

"Come now, this will not do!" the disguised detective declared, impatiently.

"I mean business, you know, every time!"

"And I am not the kind of man to stand any nonsense," he continued, with the air of one who meant what he said.

"If I find that the young lady is behind a locked door I shall most assuredly beat the door in with the first thing that comes handy—that ax yonder, on the wood-pile, for instance," the spy added, happening to catch sight of the tool.

Then he noticed that the woman cast an involuntary glance at her pocket, and he immediately conjectured that the keys were in it.

"Come, madam, the keys are in your pocket," he insisted.

"Hand them over, lively now! If the girl isn't in the house the examination will not do you any harm."

"And if she is in the house you are quite safe in betting your life that I am going to find and have a talk with her, keys or no keys!"

Curbstone Charley saw that the sleuth-hound was in thorough earnest, and so came to the conclusion that there wasn't anything to be gained by withholding the keys, particularly as it was certain that if the keys were denied him he would search for them, so he said:

"Look in your pockets, Sally, and if you have got any keys let him have them."

With a very bad grace indeed the woman produced a couple of keys.

The disguised detective took them, and with an injunction to the Irishman to keep his eyes on the prisoners, and not hesitate to use his revolvers if any of them attempted to escape, proceeded to the farm-house.

It did not take the sleuth-hound long to discover that the cellar was the only place in the house guarded by a lock.

And he was considerably surprised when he discovered what sort of a prison-pen the captors of the girl had provided for her reception.

When the supposed Italian entered, Jeanette looked at him with inquiring eyes.

From his appearance she did not think that he came to free her from her imprisonment, but judged him to be one of the tools of the conspirators.

In a few well-chosen words the disguised detective explained who he was.

So delighted was the girl that she almost fainted from excess of joy, and she overwhelmed her rescuer with thanks.

"Let us get out of this dreadful place," the sleuth-hound remarked.

"We will ascend to the kitchen, and you can tell me your story there, for this cellar is enough to give any one the horrors."

As soon as she reached the apartment, Jeanette happened to glance through the window, and so beheld the three conspirators with the handcuffs on their wrists, guarded by the Irishman with the drawn revolver.

"Oh, you have captured all of them?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I have bagged the lot!"

And then the disguised detective brought a chair for the girl, and, when she was seated, took another himself, then proceeded to explain how it was that he happened, just by pure accident, to become interested in her case.

"It was surely Heaven itself which sent you to my aid!" the girl declared.

"And yet my jailer laughed at me when I told him that Providence would certainly come to my assistance."

"Tell me your story, so I may know how to proceed in this matter," the detective said.

Then Jeanette related all that had passed. The sleuth-hound listened with the utmost attention, and when she had finished the recital, remarked:

"Upon my word this is one of the most remarkable stories that I have ever heard."

"But it is all true—I give you my word for that, sir, and I do hope that you will believe me!" Jeanette exclaimed anxiously, as though she was afraid she might be doubted.

"Oh, yes; I feel quite sure of that," the spy declared.

The girl looked delighted.

"I was so afraid that you might not believe me, for it seems to be a very improbable story," the girl said.

"Yes, I am aware of that fact," the detective observed, slowly.

"On the face of it the story does seem to be very improbable."

"The idea that a man like this wealthy banker, General Hubberton, should descend to a plot of this kind for the sake of avoiding the payment of thirty or forty thousand dollars is monstrous."

"Yes, so it seems to me," the girl observed, slowly.

"But all rich men are not angels, and I have known millionaires who did not scruple to use means to avoid the payment of money that a common day laborer would have despised."

"Oh, yes; if a man isn't honest at heart, the acquisition of wealth will not make him so," Jeanette observed.

"That is very true," the detective assented. "I happen to know something about this General Hubberton's operations, and I am aware that he is a man who is disposed to use foul means if fair will not answer, but he has always been careful to keep within the law, as far as everybody knows."

"I wonder, though, that a respectable lawyer, such as from your description this Mr. Kankershaw appears to be, should lend himself to an outrageous plot of this kind," the spy observed, in a thoughtful way.

"Of course he pretends to believe that I am crazy," Jeanette remarked, in a timid way, and as she spoke she looked askance at her rescuer, as though she was afraid he might have a lurking suspicion that her head was not all right.

"That was a device on his part to cover up his guilt," the sleuth-hound explained.

"If the man had any sense at all, he must have known that your head was all right."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that!" the girl exclaimed, joyously.

"This is a very peculiar affair," the detective remarked, with an air of deep reflection.

"I am really puzzled how to proceed."

"You have been abducted, and as that is a criminal offense, there will not be any difficulty in punishing the people who really committed the act—the two men who brought you here, and the woman who acted as your jailer."

"My evidence will easily prove that all three are guilty."

"But the three are only the paid instruments of the lawyer and the banker, who are in the background."

"Your story brings the old lawyer into the matter, but if he chooses to swear falsely and declares that he did not have you confined, nor visit you after you were a prisoner, and these people here swear that he never came, as they will undoubtedly, it may be a difficult matter to punish him."

"And I do not really want to punish them, although I was treated dreadfully," the girl remarked.

"Still I am not really injured, and I am ready to forgive all of them, but I do think I ought to have the property which my father left," Jeanette added.

"Yes, most certainly you should have the money!" the detective assented.

"And there isn't a doubt in my mind that your case is a strong one, or else they never would have taken all this trouble to get you to sign off."

"Suppose you come to New York with me and see my principal, Mr. Joe Phenix? He will be able to give you good advice," the other said, abruptly.

"Oh, yes, I will be glad to go!" Jeanette assented, eagerly.

CHAPTER XXV.

PHENIX TAKES THE CASE.

"Good! we will set out at once!" the detective exclaimed, springing to his feet.

"And while we are gone I will have this precious three locked up in the cellar."

"It will be something of a joke to give your jailers a chance to see just what sort of an experience they put you through," the sleuth-hound added with a laugh.

"I am sure that they richly deserve it!" Jeanette remarked.

"I don't know what they did with my hat and coat, but I presume they are around the house somewhere," she continued.

A search soon revealed that the articles were in the dingy parlor.

"As I do not suppose that you will care to encounter these wretches, perhaps it will be as well for you to remain in this room until I get them into the cellar," the detective suggested.

"Yes, I should prefer to have the matter arranged in that way."

So the girl remained in the parlor while Bob Ridley proceeded to the yard.

"Now, then, I will have to trouble you to walk to the house," he said to his prisoners.

"What game are you going to try now?" the bunco-man asked, sullenly.

"You will find out all in good time," the detective replied.

"But at present all you have to do is to obey instructions."

"Well, I suppose that we can't help ourselves," Curbstone Charley observed.

"Not a bit!" the disguised detective replied, promptly. "So you may as well comply with as good a grace as possible."

There was no mistaking the soundness of this reasoning, and the crooks did not say anything more until they discovered that they were to be put in the cellar, then they remonstrated.

"It isn't of any use for you to say a word!" Bob Ridley declared in a dogmatic way.

"I have got to put you in some safe place, until I can make arrangements to land you in jail, and as it will take me some time to communicate with the proper officers, you must go into the cellar."

The crooks grumbled, but as they were powerless to help themselves, they were compelled to submit.

Bob Ridley addressed a parting warning to them.

"I shall leave my assistant here to watch you, and give him strict instructions not to be afraid to use his revolver if any of you attempt to escape," he remarked.

"As I said before, this isn't a hanging matter—only a simple abduction case, and, although you are certain to be convicted if the case is pushed, yet there is a possibility that the thing can be squared."

"I am going for the old lawyer who put up the job, and through him I may be able to get at the principal who concocted the scheme."

"The young lady wants satisfaction, and I should not be surprised if the matter can be arranged so that you will all get out of this hole without getting hurt."

"I never peached on a pal yet," the bunco-man declared. "And I hate a squealer worse than I do a snake, still, if you are inclined to square the thing, and the bosses ain't disposed to be reasonable, maybe I wouldn't mind giving you a few tips."

"That is where your head is level!" the disguised detective declared.

"I have got you dead to rights in this case, and you don't stand any more show of

escaping conviction, if the case is pushed, than you do of getting out of this State by flying through the air.

"I understand, you comprehend, that the men at the back of this scheme have got lots of money, and will undoubtedly put up the cash in a liberal way to get you out of this box," the sleuth-hound continued.

"But you are too sensible a man, Charley, not to comprehend that in a plain, straightforward case of this kind all the money in the world would not be able to get you clear.

"The evidence is so direct and conclusive that no judge or jury would dare to refrain from punishing you."

The bunco-man reflected over the matter for a moment, and then he nodded assent.

"I think you are right," he admitted. "We do stand a big chance of getting salted, and unless the judge and jury can be both fixed—which isn't likely—money will not save us, so if the bosses ain't willing to do the right thing, we will have to look out for ourselves."

"Right you are, and no mistake!" Bob Ridley exclaimed.

"I am glad to see that you take so sensible a view of the matter," he continued.

"In this affair I am going to act with the idea of doing all I can for this young lady, and it is my impression at present that a compromise will be much the best for her."

"Cert! there isn't any doubt about that!" the bunco-man declared.

"It may take some little time to arrange the matter, so you must possess your souls with patience," the sleuth-hound remarked.

"You may depend upon my hurrying the matter forward as fast as possible."

"All right! I reckon we will live through it," Curbstone Charley acquiesced.

The detective saw the crooks safely confined in the cellar, then departed with Jeanette.

He took the liberty of borrowing the horse and wagon which the crooks had used to bring the young lady to the old farmhouse.

Bob Ridley drove directly to the depot, put the horse and wagon in an adjacent stable, and then, with Jeanette, took a train for New York which came along a few minutes after he completed his preparations.

Nothing of interest occurred during the trip, and when the pair arrived in New York, Bob Ridley conducted Jeanette to the office of Joe Phenix.

Fortune was favoring the disguised sleuth-hound, for the veteran detective was in the office, and disengaged, so speech was had with him immediately.

Joe Phenix listened attentively while his Mascot related what had occurred.

And then Bob Ridley explained his idea in regard to taking advantage of the affair to force the banker, General Hubbardton, to do justice to the girl.

"Of course, I don't think there is a doubt but what the banker is the man who is at the back of the business," the disguised detective said in conclusion.

"Certainly you are right in that opinion," Joe Phenix coincided.

"The man is anxious to save his money, and it was his idea that the girl could be forced into accepting a few thousand dollars."

"He is an atrocious scoundrel!" Bob Ridley declared.

"And it seems so strange to me that a man who has as much money as the general is said to possess, should grudge me the small—to him—inheritance which my father left," Jeanette observed.

"I have come in contact with this banker twice in connection with certain matters, and so have a personal knowledge of the man," Joe Phenix remarked.

"And, from what I have seen of him, I am satisfied that he is totally unscrupulous, and would not hesitate at any and all means to accomplish his ends, provided he thought he could keep the matter from coming to the knowledge of the world at large."

"But isn't it an astonishing thing that he could get this old lawyer, Kankershaw, to join in with him in such a game?" Bob Ridley asked.

"Yes, it is very strange indeed," the veteran detective replied.

"I have known Kankershaw for a number of years, and the man has always borne a good reputation," Joe Phenix continued.

"There is a mystery about the affair, but just what it amounts to is hard to say," Bob Ridley observed.

"Well, miss, are you willing that we shall undertake the management of this affair?" the veteran asked.

"Oh, yes, and I will be very much obliged indeed if you will do so!" Jeanette exclaimed, quickly.

"As I am all alone in the world I would be illy suited to contest with these powerful and unscrupulous men."

"I do not think there is much doubt but what I will be able to bring them to terms," the veteran detective remarked in his dry way.

"From the conversation that I had with Curbstone Charley I am satisfied that he will be ready, and glad, to tell all he knows about the matter just as soon as he becomes satisfied that there isn't any other way for him to keep out of prison," the sleuth-hound remarked.

"He would be a very great idiot indeed if he was not willing to make a clean breast of it under the circumstances," Joe Phenix asserted.

"But here immediately comes a question," the veteran detective added after a moment's pause.

"Have not the men in the background been careful, and shrewd enough, to cover up their connection with the affair, so that even if the crooks peach the matter cannot be brought home to them?"

"Well, as far as the general is concerned I suppose it would be a difficult matter to fix the guilt upon him, if he is persistent in his denial that he had anything to do with the case," Bob Ridley observed.

"But the old lawyer came to see Miss Hubbardton after she was entrapped and imprisoned in the cellar," the young sleuth urged.

"This can be proven, you know, both by Miss Hubbardton and the crooks."

"Very true," Joe Phenix assented. "And, under the circumstances, I fancy the old gentleman would find it an extremely difficult matter to make any judge or jury believe that he was not engaged in a plot to make Miss Hubbardton sign away her inheritance for a fourth of its value."

"Yes, the explanation would be an extremely difficult one, undoubtedly," Bob Ridley remarked.

"I will see Kankershaw as soon as possible," Joe Phenix observed.

"Take this young lady to one of the downtown hotels, where she will be comfortable, then resume your natural appearance and meet me here as soon as you can."

"In the mean time I will see the lawyer."

Jeanette thanked the veteran detective for his kindness, then departed with Bob Ridley, while Joe Phenix took his way to the office of the old lawyer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

COMING TO THE POINT.

WITHIN an hour Bob Ridley made his appearance in the detective's office.

He had abandoned his Italian boy disguise, and now appeared in the natty suit which had caused the crook to characterize him as a dude.

When attired in this garb he appeared so much like the average young man around town that it was not surprising that none of the acquaintances he made suspected he was a sleuth-hound, always eager to bring to justice the evil-doer.

The young man found Joe Phenix awaiting him, and the veteran detective at once proceeded to business.

"I have been to Kankershaw's office, and find that the old lawyer is at Long Branch, where he expects to spend a week or two," Joe Phenix explained.

"It was probably the supposition of the conspirators that the girl would not hold out against their demands for more than a couple of weeks," Bob Ridley remarked.

"And, really, when I think of the dreadful place in which they had the girl confined, I do not doubt that within that time she would have either consented to do as they wished or else become the lunatic which they

were trying to make her out to be," the young sleuth continued.

"Yes, there isn't much doubt about that, unless the girl is made of stouter stuff than the generality of her sex," the veteran man-hunter replied.

"I have been thinking this matter over, and have come to the conclusion that I will go to work on it at once," he added.

"I think you are wise; there isn't anything like striking when the iron is hot."

"We will go down to Long Branch by the first train, taking Tony Western with us, and you can drive him to the farm-house, where he will take charge of the prisoners, for as soon as the conspirators learn that we are going to take a hand in the game they may be desperate enough to attempt to block it by trying to rescue the prisoners."

"Yes, it is as well to be on the safe side, for this General Hubbardton is both an unscrupulous and a dangerous man, and there is no knowing what he may take it into his head to do when he finds that he is not going to have everything his own way."

"I must contrive to arrange the matter so he will see, when I make the attack, that he will be almost certain to get the worst of it if he attempts to fight," Joe Phenix remarked in a reflective way.

"Although bold and unscrupulous, yet he is too shrewd a man to enter upon a contest when all the odds are against him," the veteran detective continued.

Bob Ridley agreed that this was likely, then the two were joined by Tony Western, and all three departed.

Joe Phenix went direct to Long Branch, while the other two proceeded to Branchport, where they got the carryall and drove through the pines to the lonely farm-house.

At Branchport, before starting on the trip, Bob Ridley took the precaution to go before a justice of the peace and swear out a warrant for the arrest of the two crooks and the woman on a charge of abduction.

This was Joe Phenix's idea.

If the conspirators attempted to rescue the prisoners, Tony Western would be justified in repelling the assault by force of arms, being legally in charge of the three.

When the veteran detective arrived at the seaside hotel, he saw the old lawyer seated upon the veranda, reading a paper.

Joe Phenix accosted him at once and said he would like to have a private interview with him upon an important business matter.

Kankershaw was surprised, and a little alarmed, although he tried to conceal this fact, but the lynx-eyed detective readily perceived that the lawyer was far from being at his ease.

But Kankershaw said he would be pleased to comply with the request, and conducted Joe Phenix to his room.

After they were seated in the apartment, and the distinguished man-hunter had satisfied himself that there wasn't any danger of their conversation being overheard, if they spoke in an ordinary tone, he came immediately to the point.

"Mr. Kankershaw, I regret to see a man like yourself mixed up in a bad business like this abduction affair!" Joe Phenix declared, with a weighty shake of the head.

The old lawyer was so taken by surprise that for a moment all he could do was to stare at the detective.

Then, with a desperate effort, he endeavored to regain his composure and appear calm, but his face was white and his hands trembled.

"Ah, humph—excuse me, but really I do not understand just what you mean," he said, trying his best to assume a look of innocent surprise.

"Now, Mr. Kankershaw, it isn't of the slightest use for you to beat about the bush!" the detective declared, in his prompt, decided way.

"Just by accident I became interested in this affair, and all the details are known to me," he continued.

"The girl, Miss Jeanette Hubbardton, has been rescued from the den to which you consigned her, and the two crooks, Curbstone Charley and Kid Blister, together with the woman, Sally Blister, have been arrested by my men."

The eyes of the old lawyer took on a glassy stare and his underjaw dropped.

"And, being in possession of all the facts, it is not a difficult matter for me to see just what kind of a game is on the boards," Joe Phenix proceeded, in his calm, reflective way.

"You are only an instrument, of course," he continued. "And it is a matter of great surprise to me that a man like yourself, Mr. Kankershaw, should have been unwise enough to be drawn into an affair of this kind."

"As I said, I have arrested the crooks who committed the crime of abduction, and the pair, acting after the fashion of their kind, are quite ready to make a clean breast of it, if by so doing they can lighten their own punishment."

"The statement of such men would not be taken in a court of justice against my declaration!" the old lawyer exclaimed in desperation, evidently in a fearful state of agitation.

"You forget that Miss Jeanette is a witness who can corroborate the evidence of the crooks," the veteran detective replied.

"She can testify that you introduced the man who committed the abduction to her, and that if it had not been for the confidence which she had in you she would not have gone with the fellow at all."

"Then she can further testify that after she was locked up in the cellar, under the pretense that she was crazy, you called upon her, and stated that if she was willing to sign off her estate for a quarter of its value no doubt you could secure her release."

"These facts show on their face that a conspiracy had been formed to rob the girl."

"The banker, General Hubbardton, who now holds the money, is the man who is at the bottom of the affair, of course, the prime mover in the conspiracy, but you are the man who arranged the details, and had them carried out."

The old lawyer reflected over the matter for a few moments, his face so white, his whole bearing so nervous that he seemed on the verge of a total collapse.

"In Heaven's name what are you going to do?" he cried at last.

"Do you come to arrest me?"

"Well, that depends upon yourself," Joe Phenix replied.

"How so?"

"In a few words I will explain."

"I am acting in this matter for Miss Hubbardton," the veteran continued.

"As you are aware I am not a public detective, but a private one, and if I choose to make an arrangement with you in regard to this matter no one has any right to object."

"Yes, yes, very true."

"As I told you in the beginning, it was just by accident that I got into this affair, and now that I have become interested I have made up my mind to do the best I can for the young lady."

"I have rescued her from the crooks and got them safely bagged."

"Now there are two courses open to me. First, make the affair public by clapping the fellows in jail, and allow the law to take its course."

"That would be utter ruin to me!" the old lawyer declared, the very picture of misery.

"Yes, undoubtedly, for, as I said, the crooks are all ready to 'squeal,' and I suppose too that Hubbardton has been shrewd enough to arrange the affair so that it would be difficult for you to prove that he was a party to the scheme, even though it is plainly apparent that he would be the chief gainer."

Kankershaw reflected over the matter for a moment, and then he shook his head.

"Yes, if he declared that he did not know anything about the scheme I could not prove that he did," the old lawyer said, slowly.

"Then the inference would be that it was you who managed the game."

"Your plan was to get the girl to sign away her claim for a small sum, and then collect a much larger one yourself from the banker for the release."

"Yes, it would look as if I had formed such a scheme."

"But you have apparently jumped promptly to the conclusion that I am but a tool of

General Hubbardton," the old lawyer added with an inquiring look.

"That is because I feel pretty certain, from what I know of this banker, that he is a rascal."

"You are right! he is a rascal!" Kankershaw exclaimed.

"I did not believe, either, that you, of your own option, would try a scheme of this sort, and I am surprised that you could be induced to lend your aid to any such vile game."

"My dear sir, I am in this man's power. A year or so ago I became involved in a stock operation through the general's advice, and in a moment of desperation, acting on his counsel, I forged a name to a note, intending to take it up before it came due."

"As it happened, it never was used, but the note is in the general's possession, and if he chooses to swear that he knew nothing about the matter, excepting that he had received the note from me, believing it to be good, I could not prove otherwise, and would be ruined."

"I will get you out of this hole if you consent to do as I say," Joe Phenix declared.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

SOME three hours after the time when Joe Phenix arrived at the hotel, the banker, General Hubbardton, returning from a drive with a friend, alighted at the hotel, and with the friend went into the saloon and indulged in a couple of drinks.

Upon coming out he encountered Mr. Kankershaw, and perceiving that the lawyer wished to speak to him, the general excused himself to his friend and joined Kankershaw.

"The girl sent for me, and—"

But the old gentleman was quickly interrupted by the general.

"My dear fellow, this isn't any place to discuss a matter of this kind!" he declared, quickly.

"Are you staying here?"

"Yes."

"Let us go up to your room, then, where we can talk the affair over without any danger of being overheard."

"In a public place of this kind you know, the chances are great that some meddlesome, sharp-eared fellow might overhear enough to be able to give us trouble."

"Yes, that is very true," the old lawyer responded. "Well, my room is on the second floor, and it will only take us a few moments to reach it."

"It is always prudent to be on the safe side, you know."

"Certainly, certainly!" Kankershaw responded as he led the way to the stairs.

A couple of minutes later the two were seated in the old lawyer's apartment.

"Now, then, we can speak freely, so fire away!" the banker exclaimed.

"Well, I received a message that the girl wished to see me, so I went out to the old farm-house this afternoon."

"Did you find her prepared to come to terms?" the general asked.

"Yes, she is getting pretty sick of her imprisonment in the cellar."

"I don't blame her!" the banker exclaimed with a chuckle.

"As I told you when I suggested the scheme, I did not believe she would hold out for over a week."

"My dear Kankershaw, it was really a very clever game, and although you were averse to going into it at first, yet now I think you will have to admit that it is just as I told you in the beginning, an easy scheme to work, and with very little risk."

"That is true."

"I ought to have made arrangements though to have had a few large lively rats in the cellar," and the speaker chuckled with delight.

"Five or six big rats, making their appearance every now and then, as though they were anxious to make the acquaintance of the young lady, would be apt to bring her very speedily to the belief that the quicker she was out of the cellar the better it would be for her general health."

And as the general finished the speech he laid back in his chair and indulged in a hearty laugh.

"Yes, yes, that would have been a good idea," the old lawyer assented.

"But you comprehend, general, that I have never taken any interest in the matter. I merely went into the thing because you had me in such a position that I could not help myself, and I was anxious to take that note of mine, which you hold, out of your hands."

"Don't worry about that," the banker replied. "I told you that if you would manage this affair for me I would give you the note, and when it is in your hands you can destroy it as soon as you like."

"Ah, yes, and then a weight will be off my mind," the old gentleman remarked with a deep sigh.

"Well, what did the girl have to say for herself?" the general asked.

"She thinks she ought to have more money."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the banker, shaking his head in a very decided way.

"She is not willing to sign away her rights for so small a sum."

"Bah! that is always the way with these people who don't amount to anything!" the general exclaimed, disdainfully.

"Here is a poor girl who has worked hard all her life just to make a bare living, and now, when there is a chance for her to make ten thousand dollars, she is not willing to take it, but wants more."

"Yes, she certainly does."

"How much does she want?"

"Twenty thousand."

"No, no!" the general cried, decidedly. "I will not give her any such sum."

"She thinks that, as she is your brother's daughter, you ought to be willing to give her at least half the sum left by her father."

"Well, you can tell Miss Jeanette Hubbardton that she is lucky to get the offer of ten thousand, and if she doesn't take it she will have to stay in that cellar until she either dies or becomes a lunatic in reality."

"Of course, you understand that she is not crazy now."

"Yes, but the chances are that she will be if she stays in that cellar for a month or so, or else she is made of pretty stout stuff."

"But one thing is certain: I will not give her over ten thousand if she stays in the cellar until she rots!" the banker declared, fiercely.

At this point, Joe Phenix and his Mascot, Bob Ridley, made their appearance.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BROUGHT TO BOOK.

THE two detectives had been concealed in the closet.

Careful and shrewd as was the wily banker, he had not thought that it was necessary for him to examine the room so as to be sure that no eavesdropper was concealed in it.

The door was locked when the two arrived at it, and as Kankershaw had to use his key to get in, the idea never came to the general that an examination was necessary.

Both the lawyer and the banker started to their feet as the detectives made their appearance, and the old gentleman, apparently in an agony of terror, cried out:

"Joe Phenix, the detective!—oh, heavens, we are lost!"

"No, gentlemen, on the contrary you are found," Joe Phenix replied, but he spoke in such a grave way that it did not appear as if he was jesting.

"Resume your seats, gentlemen, for it will probably take some little time for us to discuss this matter," the veteran detective continued.

"I don't know, sir, that there is any subject that I would care to discuss with you!" the banker exclaimed, haughtily.

Hubbardton had turned very white at first, but now, by a powerful effort, he had revived himself to face the ordeal.

"Oh, yes there is," Joe Phenix retorted, bluntly.

"Unless, indeed, you prefer to discuss the matter in a police court before a magistrate," he added.

"A police court!" exclaimed Kankershaw, and he tottered into a chair, just as if his legs had refused to support him.

For a man who had never been upon the

stage, or taken any special training in the acting line, the old lawyer was playing his part extremely well.

"What do you mean, sir?" the banker demanded. "Have the kindness to explain yourself at once!"

"I have rescued the girl, Miss Jeanette Hubberton, your niece, from the old farmhouse where you had her confined, and arrested the two crooks, and the woman, who were in charge of the place.

"In order to curry favor with me, the crooks gave the scheme away, and I put up this little job so as to nail Mr. Kankershaw without any trouble, but, thanks to you two taking it into your heads to freely discuss the matter, so that my young man here and myself could overhear every word you said, we are in possession of all the particulars of the plot."

"That is a harsh word to use, sir!" General Hubberton exclaimed; he was so completely surprised by this unexpected development that he hardly knew what to say.

"It is the correct one," Joe Phenix replied.

"But take a seat, general, so we can talk this matter over at our ease.

"I am not acting in a public capacity in this matter, you understand, so I am not accountable to anybody for my actions," the detective explained.

"Are we to understand that there is a chance of arranging the affair?" the old lawyer inquired, eagerly.

The banker sunk slowly into a chair as Kankershaw put the question, and from the expression on his face it was plain that he was uncertain how to act.

Joe Phenix helped himself to a chair, while Bob Ridley seated himself upon the bed, as three chairs were all the room afforded.

"Oh, yes, I think the matter can be arranged without taking the world-at-large into our confidence," the veteran detective observed.

"It was by pure accident that I got into this game, and having become interested in the young lady, I made up my mind to do what I can for her."

This announcement made General Hubberton scowl, but Kankershaw rubbed his hands softly together and said in his smoothest tones:

"Well, Mr. Phenix, I can say from what I know of you, and without any desire to indulge in empty compliments, that she could not have a better adviser.

This display of weakness on the part of the old gentleman, caused the scowl on the face of the banker to deepen.

"Well, it is my opinion that I can handle the matter all right," the veteran remarked, in his quiet but decided way.

"Now, then, gentlemen, I am going to make a plain statement of the facts in this case, and I do not propose to make a single misstatement or indulge in any exaggeration," Joe Phenix continued.

"I have always found you, Mr. Phenix, to be an extremely fair man," the old lawyer hastened to observe.

The general cast a glance full of contempt at his companion, for he saw that if he concluded to make a struggle he could not rely upon Kankershaw for any aid.

"And another point which it may be as well for me to touch upon," Joe Phenix said.

"I never bulldoze, or allow myself to be bulldozed."

"Oh, no, on the contrary, I have always found you to be very quiet, although remarkably firm, in all my dealings with you," the old lawyer remarked.

Then Joe Phenix gave a history of the case, showing that the banker and Mr. Kankershaw had conspired to rob the orphan girl of her inheritance.

"While the crooks' testimony and the evidence of the girl connects you, Mr. Kankershaw, directly with the case, yet it would be more difficult to prove that you, Mr. Hubberton, was the prime instigator if myself and companion had not been lucky enough to overhear the conversation between you two which occurred in this room," the veteran detective said in conclusion.

"Our evidence completes the chain," he added.

"Well, what do you propose to do?" General Hubberton asked.

"Prosecute you on this charge unless you are willing to pay over the forty thousand dollars which you justly owe to Miss Jeanette Hubberton, your niece," Joe Phenix replied.

"Oh, and while I am settling up the case I suppose I may as well stipulate that the note which you hold—the one which Mr. Kankershaw mentioned—be turned over to him."

"Oho! that is a bid to induce him to turn against me!" the banker cried.

"Yes, it does look a little like that," the veteran detective responded, coolly.

"I refuse! I will not submit to be robbed!" Hubberton exclaimed, leaping to his feet in a rage.

"Have the kindness to cast your eyes over this legal document," Joe Phenix remarked, also rising, and tendering the paper to the banker as he spoke.

"Bob, get out your handcuffs!" the detective commanded.

The paper was a warrant for Godfrey Hubberton's arrest on the charge of abduction, issued by a justice of the peace at Branchport.

The general was too good a business man not to see at a glance that the paper was all right, and he realized that he could not help going to jail if his captor was determined that way.

The sight of the two pair of handcuffs, which the sleuth produced, was unpleasantly suggestive.

"You are surely not going to push the thing to this extremity?" the general exclaimed, white with rage.

"It is you, general, who are forcing me to do it," Joe Phenix replied.

"You are acting very foolishly, of course," the veteran man-hunter continued.

"I am going to be perfectly frank with you about this matter.

"I would have preferred, on account of its being a family matter, to have settled it quietly, but since you will not have it that way, we will fight it out in the open court.

"The chances are a thousand to one that I can convict you on this abduction charge, and then Miss Jeanette can sue you in a civil suit for her money.

"This is no attempt at bulldozing on my part, General Hubberton, you understand," Joe Phenix declared.

"But if you are disposed to contest the matter, I will try to beat you if I can," the detective asserted.

"General, it really seems to me that we are in an extremely tight place," the old lawyer observed. "And I don't see any use of fighting when all the chances are against us."

The banker pondered over the matter for a moment. He was one of the kind of men who always try to carry matters with a high hand, and it galled him terribly to find himself at such a disadvantage.

But the more he reflected upon the situation the greater became his conviction that the only course open to him was to comply with the demands of his captor.

It was the old story of the trapper entrapped.

"But how about this warrant?" he asked. "Will it not get out that it has been issued?"

"No, I took the precaution to go before a county justice, an honest Dutchman, who was glad enough to take his fees, and never troubled his head in regard to who were the men for whom the warrants were issued," the veteran detective explained.

"Well, I will agree to your terms," the banker remarked after a long pause.

"I will give you my check for forty thousand dollars, payable to the girl's order, with the understanding that all proceedings in this case are to be stopped, and no one is to be troubled for any share that they may have taken in the matter," the general continued.

"That is agreed, and I give you my word that the understanding shall be carried out."

"It is perfectly satisfactory, for I know, Mr. Phenix, that I can depend upon you," the banker remarked.

The detective bowed at the compliment.

"I have always borne the reputation of being one who kept his agreements both to friend and foe," Joe Phenix observed.

"But there is another stipulation, you

know—the note belonging to Mr. Kankershaw," the detective added.

"Ah, yes, of course; that shall be delivered to him, and as this matter may as well be settled up now as at some future time, if you will accompany me to my cottage we will close the business at once," the general remarked.

Then the four proceeded to the banker's abode.

The check for forty thousand dollars was delivered to Joe Phenix, and the important bit of paper, which the old lawyer was so anxious to obtain, to him to his great joy.

The moment it was in his hands he applied a match to it, and smiled to see it reduced to ashes.

"Now, Bob, you can ride to the old farmhouse and release the crooks, but warn them that if they do not mend their ways they will not get off so easily the next time," Joe Phenix declared.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE DIAMOND THIEVES.

FROM the banker cottage Joe Phenix proceeded to the West End Hotel, where he sought out the proprietor, who greeted him in the most cordial manner.

The host of the hotel was an old acquaintance of the detective, and had employed him on a half a dozen different occasions.

After the landlord got the veteran detective seated in his private office, and had produced some choice cigars for his enjoyment, he proceeded to explain the particulars of the losses of valuables which had caused him to summon the thief-taker to his assistance.

"And the fellows who are doing the trick are not confining their attentions to my house solely," the landlord explained. "Although so far my guests have lost more heavily than the people at the other hotels, yet that is, I presume, because we have had some tip-top parties here, with wealth galore, and they had more to lose."

"There is something in that, of course," the detective remarked.

"Now one of the strange things about these robberies is that the most of them have been committed in such a manner that at first the sufferers were inclined to believe that the loss was owing to their own carelessness."

Joe Phenix nodded to show that he was paying due attention.

"So far women have been the losers, and only valuable things like diamonds, which could easily be disposed of, have been taken."

"A discriminating lot of crooks."

"At the hotel hops, there is great rivalry among the women in regard to dresses and jewelry, and as we have a large number of ladies of fortune here at present, the display of jewelry is well worth observation."

"Yes, I comprehend; these idle dames of wealth have nothing better to do than to attempt to outshine each other."

"The first loss which was reported to me was that of a diamond brooch belonging to Mrs. Samuel Rudiger, of Cincinnati."

"Sam Rudiger himself is one of the big whisky kings, and although Mrs. Sam is not fair, though she is fat and forty, she makes up for the charms which nature has denied her by going in strong on dresses and jewelry."

"She desires to shine as a society queen, I suppose."

"Yes, that is her idea, although apart from the fact that her husband is an extremely wealthy man, she does not possess a single requisite for the position."

"That is generally the case," the detective observed. "The less a man or woman is fitted for anything of the kind, the greater is their desire to assume the role."

"Exactly! that is precisely the situation in this instance."

"Neither Sam, nor his wife amount to anything socially speaking."

"Sam was a workman in a Kentucky distillery, and his wife a servant girl when he married her."

"By some lucky turn of fortune's wheel, Sam made a strike, got hold of a distillery, and then went into a 'trust,' and they say he is worth half-a-million or more."

"This is a marvelous age for money-

making if a man happens to get the proper opportunity, and is shrewd enough to improve it," Joe Phenix remarked.

"From the description which I have given, you will understand that Mrs. Sam was just the woman to try and dazzle the world by a gorgeous display of diamonds."

The detective nodded.

"It was at a Saturday night hop that the loss of the brooch occurred."

"At first she was inclined to believe that it became unfastened, and, during the dance, had dropped to the floor."

"It was an elaborate affair, costing a cool five thousand dollars, and, naturally, she was very much annoyed by the loss."

"I instituted an immediate investigation, but was not able to discover any trace of the jewel, and so was reluctantly obliged to come to the conclusion that it had been stolen, either by some one who had picked it up from the floor, or else some high-class crook who had selected my ballroom as an operating ground, and in the guise of a guest set out to rob my patrons."

"Such a game has been worked but it takes an extra good man to carry it out," the veteran detective observed.

"I am satisfied that it is the true explanation of the mystery, although neither my detective, nor the ones employed by the other hotels, are able to spot the man, or men, for I presume there is more than one concerned in the robberies."

"Yes, such fellows usually work in pairs, and very often they have the assistance of a woman," Joe Phenix explained.

"There has been about a dozen of these mysterious robberies, and the history of one case is the history of all," the landlord explained.

"And, so far, the detectives are completely at fault," he continued.

"They are good men too."

"Yes, and my detective has the reputation of knowing every crook in the country who amounts to anything."

"And he has not been able to spot any suspicious parties?"

"No, not one, and the detectives employed by the other hotels are in the same boat."

"And all the losses have occurred at the hops?" Joe Phenix asked in a reflective manner.

"Yes."

"No attempts made to rob the guests in their rooms?"

"No, none."

"Have you heard of any robberies attempted, or committed, at any of the private houses?"

"Not a case! I was talking with the chief of police this morning and he remarked how free the town had been of thieves this year."

"Of course, I presume you understand, Mr. Phenix, that we have done our best to keep this matter quiet, thinking we would have a better chance to catch the rogues."

"Yes, I comprehend, and I think it was wise for you to work in that way," the veteran detective remarked.

"Well, what do you think of the affair, anyway?" the host asked.

"It is going to be a difficult job in my opinion," Joe Phenix replied.

"Have you been able to form any theory in regard to how the stealing has been done?"

"Yes, from what you have told me I am inclined to believe that it is not the work of regular crooks, but some amateurs are doing the stealing."

The landlord meditated over the matter for a moment, and then he said:

"You think that some of the guests have yielded to the temptation of helping themselves to their neighbors' valuables?"

"Yes, that is the way it looks to me," Joe Phenix replied.

"Some man or woman who wishes to cut a dash in society, yet lacks the means, has hit on the idea of stealing diamonds, for the stones can easily be removed from the settings and readily sold."

"I see!" the landlord assented. "And it would be a difficult matter to trace the stones when separated from the settings?"

"Exactly! I presume you have sent notices of the loss of these valuables to the New York pawnbrokers, so as to put them on their guard against buying the gems?"

"Yes; notice was sent immediately."

Joe Phenix indulged in a quiet smile.

"That is the usual course pursued, and yet, in reality, the precaution does not amount to anything. If the crooks who do the stealing know their business, they always take the booty to a receiver of stolen property—some 'fence' who makes a living by getting rid of such things—and all the notices in the world do not trouble him any."

"It is only the stupid, clumsy crook, or the amateur, who is caught in the pawnbroker's net."

"Very true."

"I will put a party on this case immediately," the man-hunter declared.

"Good! and the quicker the better."

"And in order to do the work as it ought to be done, the party will come as a guest, and it will not be necessary either for you, or any one else, to know that he is not the genuine article."

"All right! I am satisfied!" the host responded. "If no one in the hotel knows the spy, it is a sure thing that he cannot be betrayed by any one in the establishment."

"That is the idea," Joe Phenix assented.

"And if you should have your suspicions in regard to any party, keep them to yourself."

And this ended the interview.

CHAPTER XXX.

AN APPOINTMENT.

WHEN Joe Phenix came out of the private office of the hotel he found his two aids, Bob Ridley and Tony Western awaiting him.

"Did you release the crooks?" the veteran detective asked.

"Yes, and mighty glad they were, too, to get out of the scrape," Tony Western replied.

"But they are dead sore on this party here," he continued, nodding to Bob Ridley, who laughed.

"The trouble is that I had to 'knock out' both of the fellows," the young detective explained. "And it is only natural that they should feel badly about it."

"It isn't pleasant, you know, for a man to think that he is a fighter, and then come across somebody who, as the boys say, 'makes a monkey out of him' without any trouble."

"I do not believe that you will need to lose any sleep on their account, although they may threaten to do all sorts of dreadful things upon the first convenient opportunity," Joe Phenix remarked in his dry way.

Then the three took a carriage to the depot, and on the way Joe Phenix related the particulars of his interview with the hotel-keeper.

"I think you can trap these rascals if you work the game in the right way," the veteran detective said in conclusion, addressing the young sleuth.

"Shall I try the old scheme of offering myself as a bait?" Bob Ridley asked.

"Yes; as you say, it is an old game—in fact, an extremely ancient one, but it is generally successful if it is played carefully," Joe Phenix remarked.

"You can depend upon me to do my best, of course," the young sleuth remarked.

"Oh, yes, that goes without saying," the chief replied.

"You must get yourself up regardless of expense, and display ten or fifteen thousand dollars worth of diamonds," Joe Phenix explained.

"My sparklers are in the hands of the Central Safe Deposit Company, and after I get into my petticoats again I will stop there and get them," Bob Ridley observed.

"Now, then, for the story," the veteran detective remarked in a reflective way.

"Let me see," he continued. "The California widow is as good as any tale which can be got up, I think."

"Your husband made an enormous fortune in the old Big Bonanza time, died a couple of years ago, and left you with a large estate."

"That is a delightful kind of a fairy tale!" the irrepressible Bob Ridley observed, with a laugh.

"And you will need an attendant," Joe Phenix added.

"It will be necessary to have some one to

tell how rich you are, and boast generally about you and the glorious State of California."

"Yes, for as a woman I cannot do much bragging, excepting among my own sex," the young sleuth abserved.

"How would Redmond do?" Tony Western asked.

This was the old man who acted as Joe Phenix's clerk, and had charge of his office.

"I had Redmond in my thoughts when I spoke," the chief replied.

"He is a stranger in New York, has only been here a couple of months, and as he has spent the last ten years in California, he will be able to hold his own in case he happens to encounter any Californian."

"Being an old detective, too, although owing to his age he has not actively followed the calling for some years, he will be able to afford valuable assistance."

"When will the scheme begin?" Bob Ridley asked.

"As soon as you are ready," Joe Phenix replied.

"It will not take me long to make my preparations," the young sleuth observed.

"Although I am not particularly given to playing the grand dame, yet I have always made it a rule to keep up with the fashions, and so have a few handsome dresses which will come nicely in play on an occasion of this kind."

"An hour or so will be enough to enable me to prepare myself, and so I can arrive at Long Branch to-night, if you think it is advisable."

"Yes, I do think so," Joe Phenix replied.

"In my opinion the sooner the better, unless you are detained in New York by having to take some steps in this Armitage business," the veteran detective continued.

"Yes, it is possible that there may be a communication at the hotel for me from him," Bob Ridley remarked, thoughtfully.

"In this little affair I worked the bait game, too, and the result was all that I could wish," the young detective continued.

"This Armitage is a thorough rascal, and I am satisfied that just as soon as he thinks he can do so with safety he will endeavor to put himself in communication with me, in hopes that he can get hold of the money which he believes I have come to New York to get."

"When we arrive in New York, we will go directly to the hotel, and if no word has come, you can arrange to proceed at once to Long Branch," Joe Phenix observed.

"But, suppose there is a communication there for me from Armitage?" Bob Ridley asked.

"I don't think it is likely that there will be one, for there has hardly been time," he added.

"Still, I think that it is wise to always provide for contingencies of this kind."

"Well, if there is a message there from Armitage and there appears to be any chance of his capture, this Long Branch business must wait," Joe Phenix decided.

"The way the matter stands, it does not seem as if two or three days would make much difference," Tony Western observed.

"The only danger to be feared is that the rascals may get out of the way, either because they are satisfied with the plunder they have obtained, or else taken to flight for fear of being apprehended," the veteran detective remarked.

"I don't think that it is likely though that they will get out," Tony Western declared.

"I agree with you that it is not," Joe Phenix assented.

"Few men or women in this life are satisfied with their gains, no matter whether they ought to be or not," the sagacious man-hunter continued.

"So far, these unknown marauders have succeeded in playing their game in the most complete manner, and as the detectives are all at sea regarding them, it is improbable that anything will occur to excite their apprehensions, so it is safe to conclude, I think, that they will keep on, anxious to secure more plunder."

"According to the hotel keeper's story, they must have got away with ten or twelve thousand dollars' worth of diamonds," Bob Ridley remarked.

"Yes; a handsome amount," Joe Phenix declared.

"And when I make my appearance on the scene, it will look as if they had a chance to get hold of another ten thousand dollars' worth without much trouble," the young sleuth remarked.

At this point their arrival at the depot ended the conversation.

They boarded the train and in due time arrived in New York.

Straight to the hotel opposite the Grand Central Depot they proceeded.

The manager happened to be in the office, and, having been warned by Joe Phenix about the letters addressed to the supposed young woman, Miss Moravia, at once ushered the party into the private office, and, after giving the veteran thief-taker a letter which had arrived, discreetly withdrew.

"Aha! the fellow wants you to meet him on Riverside avenue to-night!" Joe Phenix exclaimed, after casting a hasty glance at the letter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ARRANGING THE TRAP.

"ON Riverside avenue to-night?" the young trailer asked.

"Yes, at Ninety-third street; but, listen to the letter and see how artfully the man puts in a special plea in regard to his innocence," Joe Phenix remarked.

And then he read the letter aloud, as follows:

"MY DEAR MISS MORAVIA:—

"No doubt you are greatly surprised by the occurrence which took place on the train, but I trust you will believe me when I say that it was all a mistake on the part of the man who made the unwarrantable attack on me. I am at present staying with some friends, who are assisting me in getting proof that the man who attacked me made a great blunder, and it is my intention, as soon as I get matters in the proper shape, to bring the ruffian into court and have him severely punished.

"But, as I have discovered through the kind offices of my friends that the man has a powerful political pull, I am compelled to remain in concealment until I can get the affair so arranged that the fellow cannot escape punishment.

"I should like very much to see you, but my friends are averse to my venturing abroad during the daytime. Yet, if you will come to the corner of Riverside avenue and Ninety-third street to-night at 8:30 I will be there.

"Leave the hotel about eight o'clock, and go through Forty-second street to Sixth avenue, there take the Elevated Road and get out at Ninety-third street; then it is only a short distance to Riverside avenue, which runs along by the river.

"I will, probably, be waiting for you on the corner, but in case I should happen to be detained, cross the street to the river side, turn to the left and walk down the avenue so as to meet me coming up.

"Of course I rely upon you not to mention this letter to any one, or to reveal that you have had any communication with me, for my friends have found out that the man who made such a blunder is terribly alarmed in regard to the matter and is straining every nerve to give me trouble.

"It is possible that the fellow, in his desperation, may have put a watch on you, thinking there is a probability that, through you, he can get at me.

"If such should be the case, it would be a capital joke to fool the rascal, and I will tell you how to do it.

"After you buy your ticket at the Elevated Road watch and see who comes after you; then when the train stops, do not be in a hurry to get on board, but appear to be undecided as to which of two cars to take, and so contrive to miss the train.

"Then watch and see if any of the people who came on the platform, after you, have not got on board.

"If there is anybody loitering there, without any apparent reason, the chances are that the person is a spy deputed to follow you.

"Keep your eyes on this person; and when the next train arrives, act as if you did not intend to go on board, and then, at the last moment, make a sudden rush just as the gates are being closed.

"By so doing the chances are that the spy will be tricked.

"You will get on board, and the watcher will not.

"On leaving the train, too, at Ninety-third street, take particular notice whether anybody follows you from the station to the street; but, if you are careful to do as I say, it is almost certain that no spy, no matter how skillful, will be able to follow you.

"Again I must caution you to be careful and not breathe a word in regard to this letter to any one.

"Yours most respectfully,

"ROBERT L. JOHNSON."

"That is certainly an extremely well-written letter," Bob Ridley observed. "How artfully he appeals to the imagination of the girl, making himself out to be a persecuted man, and giving her the idea that by aiding him escape the pursuit of the officers she will be performing a laudible act."

"Yes, the fellow is possessed of brains, no doubt about that," Joe Phenix observed.

"But, like all the men who fall into a crooked way of life, he makes the mistake of trying to do too much," the veteran detective shrewdly continued.

"By about as daring an attempt as ever came to my knowledge, he succeeded in escaping from arrest, after being securely nailed, and if he had sense enough to take himself off to parts unknown, he would, probably, have bid defiance to all the efforts which we might make to capture him.

"But in his eagerness to try and swindle the supposed country maiden out of the money which he thinks she has gone to New York to get, he exposes himself to the chance of recapture."

"These rogues are always making blunders of this kind," Tony Western remarked with the air of a philosopher.

"It is lucky for the people in the detective line that they do make such mistakes, otherwise it would be a much more difficult matter to catch rascals than it is," the young sleuth observed.

"That is true," the veteran detective assented. "And although the world-at-large gives us man-hunters credit for possessing a wonderful amount of acuteness, yet in the majority of cases we capture our men, because, notwithstanding all their smartness, they make such dreadful blunders.

"But now let us see how we had best arrange this matter," Joe Phenix continued.

"You will keep the appointment, of course, and as it is evident that this fellow will be on the look-out, it will not do to have any one follow you, or to put men in the neighborhood in advance, for as this bird is a sly one, he would be sure to take the alarm."

"But, really, Mr. Phenix, I do not believe I will need any assistance," Bob Ridley remarked. "He is a good-sized fellow, I know, but I think I can catch him at a disadvantage so as to get the bracelets on him."

"I do not think you will have much trouble in capturing him, for you will have the advantage of taking the man completely by surprise, but it is just as well to have help at hand in case you should need it," Joe Phenix assumed.

"That is true," the young sleuth assented. "But how will you arrange the matter?"

"The man has selected this particular spot for a rendezvous because the nature of the ground affords him an opportunity to escape if a trap is set, and an attempt made to capture him," the detective explained.

"It is a lonely spot after nightfall, and few people, or vehicles, pass up or down."

"The street runs close to the Central Railroad tracks, and it is only some twenty-five or thirty feet down a steep bank to the iron way, so if the man apprehended that the officers were at hand, all he has to do is to leap over the wall, dash down the bank, and, in the darkness, he would stand an excellent chance of making his escape either up or down the track."

The others nodded assent, both being familiar with the locality, and therefore able to comprehend how shrewdly the veteran had calculated the chances.

"And here again is where the man, not-

withstanding his smartness, has made another blunder," Joe Phenix observed.

"He has not taken into consideration the fact that the same conditions which are so favorable for his escape, if the detectives try to jump on him, are equally as good for the officers in trying to get at him," the man-hunter continued.

"You, Tony, disguised as a tramp, and apparently considerably under the influence of liquor, will come up the track, timing your movements so as to arrive at Ninety-third street about eight-forty, and at that point you will encounter Herring Bob, also got up as a tramp."

"You will stop and talk a while with him, then both of you must get out pipes, light them and stroll off down the track together, but not going over a block away, so as to be ready to come to the assistance of Ridley, here, when he gives the signal."

"A good scheme," Tony Western remarked.

"Yes, and sharp as this fellow, Armitage, undoubtedly is, he will never suspect anything suspicious about two tramps proceeding along the railway, for that is the favorite walk of such fellows," the young man-chaser observed.

"And I will reach the ground in a *coupe*, with a coachman in livery, a regular swell affair," Joe Phenix continued—"just such a turn-out as is often seen in the neighborhood, and therefore its appearance will not excite Armitage's apprehensions."

So the matter was arranged.

At eight that evening the detective, Bob, now arrayed like a woman, transformed into Miss Moravia again, left the hotel and proceeded to keep the appointment.

And, although she knew very well that she was not followed, yet for fear that Armitage, carefully disguised, might be keeping a watch upon her, she followed the instructions, which he had given her, to the letter.

The spy was sharp-eyed, and at the Sixth Avenue L Station she fancied that a rather shabbily-dressed old man, with a full gray beard and long, straggling hair of the same hue, who looked like an East Side Jew, was paying rather more attention to her movements than was natural.

When she made her rush to get on the train he also did the same.

"Aha! I will bet a good round sum that this old Jew is my gentleman!" the spy murmured to herself after she took her seat.

The man did not remain in the same car with the young sleuth, but went into the next one.

When the girl left the train at the Ninety-third street station she looked for the man, and, sure enough, he was on the platform, but after she got to the ground and went down Ninety-third street, toward the river, she noticed that the man did not follow her but went up the avenue.

"Ah, yes, now I see his little game," she murmured.

"He is going through the next street, so as to come down Riverside avenue, then he will be able to see as he passes Ninety-third street whether there are any suspicious-looking men in the neighborhood."

"This fellow is a smart rascal, but, clever as he is, I think we will trap him without any difficulty."

The night was not a dark one, as the moon was just coming up, so the disguised detective was able to make out the surroundings without any difficulty as she proceeded.

She walked along at a slow pace, and, as she anticipated, when she reached Riverside avenue, the supposed old Jew was coming down the street.

The spy halted on the corner for a moment and looked around her, as though she was seeking the person whom she had come to meet.

No one was in sight but the old man, so, after bestowing a casual glance on him, the girl crossed the street and walked down by the side of the stone wall, as she had been instructed.

The old man kept on at a brisk pace on the opposite side of the way, so the spy was able to keep her eyes upon him, although apparently she was not paying any attention to his movements.

By this time she was sure her surmise—that the old man was Armitage in disguise—was correct.

After the old man had proceeded for a couple of blocks, he crossed the street and came up so as to meet the girl.

As he approached, she pretended to be looking out on the river, and would have passed him without notice if he had not called her by name.

"You are prompt, Miss Moravia!" he remarked.

The spy halted immediately, pretended to be very much surprised, and stared at the man.

"You do not recognize me?" he said.

"Your voice seems to be familiar, yet I cannot recall your face at all," the girl replied, with a charming affectation of innocence.

"My disguise must be extremely good, then, to deceive such sharp eyes as you have," he declared with a light laugh.

"I am the person whom you came to meet, Miss Moravia—Mr. Armitage," he continued.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed, affecting to be greatly amazed.

"Yes; I am acting on the advice of my friends, who think it will be wise for me to go in disguise until I can get all the arrangements perfected to prove my innocence of the charge made against me."

"Oh, yes, I see," and the spy smiled sweetly.

And, as she spoke, she caught sight of a carriage coming up the avenue.

This was the one which contained Joe Phenix, she judged; hence it was about time to bring the comedy to an end.

"Your disguise is a remarkable one," she admitted. "I did not recognize you even after you spoke, although your voice was familiar to me. It is really a wonder, I think, that you could make such a change in your appearance."

Then she allowed the handkerchief which she held in her hand to flutter to the ground.

"Oh, dear! how careless of me!" she exclaimed.

"Permit me!" Armitage immediately remarked, and he stooped to pick up the handkerchief.

This was the opportunity which the disguised spy desired.

As Armitage straightened up she dealt him a most terrific blow, which, landing directly under the ear, sent the man reeling to the ground!

Then, with a tiger-like spring, she pounced upon him, and before the half-stunned and wholly bewildered man comprehended what was being done, she had the handcuffs upon his wrists!

"I told Phenix that I thought I could do the trick myself without any assistance," the female detective muttered, with a great deal of satisfaction, as she arose to her feet.

By this time the carriage had arrived on the scene of action, and, as the sleuth-hound had anticipated, Joe Phenix was on hand.

He had been on the watch, and, from the window had seen the attack.

The carriage halted by the curbstone, and the veteran detective got out.

"You were right about not needing any assistance," Phenix confessed, with a smile of satisfaction.

"I will warn the boys that the game is bagged," and he sounded a shrill call on his whistle.

The handcuffed man had struggled to his feet, and stood glaring with rage at the female detective.

"You are a police spy—the one who gave me away in the first place, I suppose, and yet I never suspected it, curse you!" he vociferated in terrible wrath.

"Bad words will not aid you," the woman replied, shortly. "You are trapped again and I don't believe you will get away this time."

At this moment the other two aides appeared. The prisoner was placed in the coupe, and conveyed at once to Police Headquarters.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN COUNCIL.

It is a week since the events related in our last chapters, and once more we transport the reader to the summer city.

The Englishman, Howard Fitz Gerald, and the Irish captain, McCracken, sat on the veranda of the West End Hotel enjoying their cigars.

The pair had just come from dinner, and the dusk of the evening was beginning to veil land and sea.

The two had taken seats at the extreme end of the veranda, away from the crowd, so they were able to converse without danger of their words being overheard.

The captain had been away all day, having been over to Pleasure Bay to a shooting match, and so had not seen the Englishman, until they met at the table.

"Fizzy, my jewel, it seems to me that you are not after being in the best of spirits this evening?" the captain remarked after the pair had got comfortably seated and their cigars lighted.

"Has anything been after happening to interfere with your peace of mind?"

"Yes; I am afraid things are not going to run as smoothly as they might."

"To what do you refer?"

"The girl business."

"What is the trouble?"

"The banker doesn't like the idea of my marrying his daughter."

"Is that possible?"

"Yes; so Mrs. Hubberton informed me this afternoon."

"Well, it is a smart woman she is, and you can depend upon every word she says. I am after thinking!" the Irishman averred stoutly.

"No doubt about that."

"Do you think it will be after making any difference?"

"I don't know as he will be able to keep the girl from having me," the Englishman answered. "I have played a careful game, and Mrs. Hubberton has assisted me to the best of her ability."

"It's a fine woman she is, bedad!" the captain reassured, "and under the circumstances, being after having the ear of the girl, she would be able to do yees a h'ape of good."

"Oh, yes; and as the heiress has an idea, of course, that her step-mother and I are on extremely good terms, she has not hesitated to tell her just what she thought about me."

"Aha! be the powers! ye had it beautifully arranged!"

"Yes, and everything was going so smoothly that I did not think I would have the slightest difficulty in getting the girl to consent to marry me when I thought the proper time had come to ask her."

"Why does General Hubberton object?"

"I don't exactly know, for Mrs. Hubberton is in the dark in regard to his precise reason. The banker is a shrewd and wily old customer, you know, and he understands enough about womankind to be aware that if he came out openly and announced that he did not approve of the match, the daughter, from the sheer spirit of contradiction, would be pretty certain to disagree with him in regard to the matter."

"Oh, yis, that is the way it usually works!" the captain declared.

"The banker is too wise to make a mistake of that kind," the Englishman explained. "He makes no open opposition to the match, but, in an underhand way, has dropped certain hints that a good many people have doubts as to my being what I represent myself to be."

"Oho! the murdering blaggard! Is it trying to take away your character he is?"

"Yes; he pretends, you know, that he doesn't know or care anything about me, but is only repeating the gossip of the men about town."

"The deluding dodger!"

"According to his story, it is currently believed that I am an adventurer, without either money or position—a fortune-hunter, whose chief object is to entrap some rich American girl into a marriage."

"Wow, wow!" the Irishman exclaimed with an ominous shake of the head. "Shure! if the girl was after having the false belief in the statement, your cake would be all dough."

"The old fellow has managed the matter so artfully that he has made the girl uneasy, and I can see from her manner toward me

that she is afraid there may be some degree of truth in the rumors.

"Mrs. Hubberton, in her desire to do all she can to help the match along, has done her best to persuade Madeline that there isn't any truth in the reports, but as the girl is naturally suspicious and distrustful, the reports have made an impression upon her."

"It was only this afternoon, you understand, that I got an explanation from Mrs. Hubberton of what has been going on," Fitz Gerald continued.

"The old fellow got a hint, apparently, from some one three or four days ago that his daughter and I were likely to make a match, and then he immediately set to work to interfere."

"I noticed that the girl's manner toward me had changed during the last few days, and she suddenly manifested a great interest in my past life, inquiring about my relatives and friends in England, and putting all sorts of curious questions in regard to high life abroad."

"Faix! it isn't the likes of her that could be after puzzling ye with any questions of that kind!"

"Oh, no, for although my past life may not be an altogether creditable one, and I don't doubt that if certain passages in it were known to the lady she would be horrified, yet I am the man that I represent myself to be."

"Yis, yis, that is certain!"

"I will not swear that the stories I tell, in a careless way, about my rich relatives, and my chance of one day coming in for a noble title, and an immense estate, are strictly true," the Englishman remarked with a laugh.

"Ah, there is only about fifty lives between you and them trifles, and if a plague should be after setting in, maybe ye might stand a chance of coming in for the title and estate," the captain observed with a chuckle.

"Oh, yes; I might be struck by lightning, as these Americans say," Fitz Gerald returned.

"Well, there are a good many shady passages in my life, but, as the events all occurred on the other side of the water, it will be a difficult matter for anybody in this country to prove anything against me."

"True for you!"

"But, if this young woman should take it into her head to ask me to present proofs that my great expectations stand some chance of being realized in the future the game would be up."

"Ah, yis; unless she was willing to take my word for it," the captain observed with a sly wink.

"Mrs. Hubberton, of course, is doing her best to aid me; and she asserts that although she was not personally acquainted with me in Europe, yet she knows all about me by reputation, and so is sure that I am no adventurer."

"But, what do you suppose is the reason why the banker has made the dead set at ye?" the Irishman asked.

"It is impossible to say, and Mrs. Hubberton is completely in the dark."

"Has he charge of the girl's money?"

"No; it is invested in various stocks and bonds, so he does not have the handling of it, and, as far as the money goes, it does not make any difference to him whether she marries or not."

"Yis, yis."

"I am very much afraid the game is up, though, for the girl's suspicions are excited, and I may not be able to satisfy her."

"That is bad."

"Well, I don't know but what I can do better," the Englishman remarked.

"Do better? how can ye?"

"This Californian widow, this Mrs. MacGregor, the woman with the diamonds."

"Yis, and illigant jewels they are, too," the captain declared.

"Acting on your idea, I have been very attentive to the widow since I made her acquaintance, and I think she has fallen in love with me."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WIDOW.

The captain laid back in his chair and indulged in a quiet laugh.

"Well, well, I didn't expect that, and it is astonished I am!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"I do not think there is any mistake about the matter," the Englishman asserted.

"I met her on the beach to-day, and we had quite a long chat in one of the summer-houses."

"Yis, yis, that was pleasant!"

"And she acted in such a way as to give me the impression that I could induce her to become Mrs. Fitz Gerald without a great deal of trouble."

"I heard that she was after having lashings of money, but I don't know how true it is," the captain remarked.

"Her diamonds are illigant though; there is no mistake about them, bedad!"

"The conversation that I had with her made me think that there was a possibility that I could do better than to keep on with the banker's daughter."

"Of course you want to be sure, you know, about this woman's money," the captain warned.

"Oh, I think she is all right. I had a talk with the old fellow who acts as her escort and secretary."

"He was formerly business manager for her husband, who was interested in the Big Bonanza Mine, which made millionaires out of all the men who had anything to do with it."

"Yis, I have read about that same," the captain remarked.

"Her husband was an old man, enormously wealthy when this girl married him; in fact, the secretary does not hesitate to state, bluntly, that it is his opinion that if MacGregor hadn't plenty of money the woman would never have had anything to do with him."

"Of course not!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"What would a foine, strapping gurl like this wan want of an ould man if he hadn't plenty of money to give her everything she liked."

"The secretary didn't hesitate to say that the pair led a cat-and-dog life, for the old man was a tough customer, but he died suddenly, and his wife came in for all of his property for he hadn't a relative in the world."

"How much did he have?"

"A million, about."

"Wow, wow!" cried the captain. "Upon me would! if this story is true, it would be a glorious speculation for you to marry the widdy!"

"I do not think there is any doubt that she is worth a great deal of money," the Englishman remarked.

"Why the diamonds she wore at the hop last night must have been worth thirty or forty thousand dollars."

"Oh, yis, yis, aisy enough, me jewel!" the captain assented.

"It is a judge of diamonds I am, and I will go bail that the necklace she had on never cost a cint less than twinty thousand dollars."

"It was certainly beautiful, and she outshone any other woman in the room, although she cannot be called a beautiful girl, yet she is by no means ugly."

"If she has got plenty of money, it doesn't matter if she is as ugly as a hedge-fence!" the Irishman exclaimed.

"Yes, you are right; going on the principle, of course, that a man ought not to look a gift-horse in the mouth."

"That is quite correct."

"I will say to you frankly, Mac, that, of the two women, I very much prefer the banker's daughter, for there is something about this other girl that I don't exactly like," Fitz Gerald observed, in a thoughtful way.

"Oh, what does it matter what the woman is, as long as she has plinty of money?" the captain exclaimed.

"I fancy that she is inclined to be rather hot-tempered at times, and fond of having her own way."

"One thing is certain: she and her husband quarreled from the beginning, according to the secretary's story," the Englishman continued. "But he asserts that it was all the old millionaire's fault, for he tried to play the tyrant with the girl, and she would not submit."

"It is very likely," the Irishman observed.

"Rich young men who marry poor young

girls are often after making their lives miserable."

"It is natural, of course, for the secretary to declare that the old man was to blame; he is dead, while the wife is alive and the secretary receives a handsome salary from her."

"Of course! Why wouldn't the man be after sticking up for the wan who pays him?"

"The secretary strikes me as being a sort of a soft old fellow although he may be a good business man enough," Fitz Gerald explained.

"My object in cultivating his acquaintance was to find out all I could about the widow, for from the way she has acted toward me since I made her acquaintance—I have danced with her at three different hops, you know—I have the impression that she is particularly well-pleased with me, so I sounded the secretary, saying that it was a wonder that a young and pretty woman like Mrs. MacGregor, who had plenty of money, didn't get married again."

"And what did he say?"

"That she wouldn't marry the best man in the world, for her past experience in the married state had been a decidedly disagreeable one."

"Ah, yis; that is what a widow is always after saying," the captain remarked with the air of an oracle.

"But, just as soon as the man comes along that takes their eye, they jump at him like a hungry trout at a fly."

"Another point which is in my favor: the woman was poor, and, through her marriage, has become rich, and no doubt the thought has come to her that if she married a man like myself, a scion of one of the great English families, she could go to Europe and become a very queen, having plenty of money to support her rank."

"And she could, too; divil a bit of a lie in that at all, at all!"

"Well, I think this one will be far better for me than the banker's daughter, for she will not be apt to be inquisitive in regard to my past life, while I feel tolerably certain that the other would be."

"Of course, I may have made a mistake in thinking she has taken a fancy to me, but I don't think I have," Fitz Gerald remarked in conclusion.

"Oh, no, you are too old a stager to make a mistake of that kind," the Irishman declared.

"If I were you, I would go in and win!"

"Well, I will certainly try my best to carry off the prize."

"Ah, and that reminds me, by the way, that I forget to tell ye about an acquaintance that I made to-day at the shooting-match, a Cuban gentleman, a man of considerable wealth I should judge from his conversation, and about as soft a party as I have met with in a dog's age."

"He, too, has illigant diamonds, and a great admiration for sport; he is a hearty old buck, do ye mind? a man of sixty, or thereabouts, and I have undertaken to show him the ropes."

"Well, he has made a wise selection," the Englishman declared with a laugh.

"Of course he must not expect to get the valuable information without paying a good price for it," Fitz Gerald added.

"From what I have seen of the man it is a great wonder to me he has not tumbled into some trap long ago," the Irishman remarked. "For he appears to be as soft as cheese, and as he has a thirst on him which is wonderful to behold, it is strange that some polite gentleman has not been after improving the opportunity to make a good stake, as these Americans say."

"You ought to be able to do something with him, then."

"I shall try, me boy, you can depend upon that!" the captain asserted with a knowing wink.

"Well, if your man is not up to snuff you will, undoubtedly, get a good rake out of him," the Englishman remarked.

"And speaking about his being a softy, if he is any softer than this secretary of the California widow, he must be well worth seeing," Fitz Gerald continued.

"He, too, is considerable of a drinker, and

is a good illustration of the old adage, 'when the wine is in the wits are out.'

"I took pains to-day to go to considerable trouble to entertain the gentleman."

"You were after information, of course?"

"Yes, and I got it, too—in fact, got much more than I expected," Fitz Gerald explained, "for after the man had a half a dozen drinks he was ready to tell me all he knew."

"Well, it is a coaxing way that ye have wid you, anyhow."

"And then he had told me all I wished to know about the widow's history, I carelessly mentioned that she had some magnificent diamonds, and must needs take great precautions to prevent them from being stolen."

"Ahal that is what a lawyer would call a lading question, but I suppose this softy didn't have a suspicion that you were after drawing him on?"

"No; he explained just how she arranges about the jewels. She carries with her a miniature safe, so small that it can be easily handled. In this the diamonds are kept when she is not wearing them, and the safe is locked up in her trunk."

"Upon me would! this is the most careless way of handling valuable jewels that I ever heard of!" the captain declared in apparent amazement.

"Yes, that is exactly what I thought, but, of course, I was careful not to allow the fellow to know what my opinion was in regard to the matter."

"Unless the lock on the woman's trunk is an unusually good wan, there is no reason why a man, wid his wits about him, and wid the courage to do a job of this kind, shouldn't be able to get at the sparklers," the captain assured.

"Well, as far as I can see there are no particular difficulties in the way," the Englishman declared. "In my opinion the way the matter stands, it would be more difficult to get rid of the diamonds than to get possession of them."

"Oh, that could be easily arranged!"

The approach of some gentlemen, who accosted the pair, interrupted the conversation at this point.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ASTONISHING REVELATION.

AND now, we come to the night of the day upon which the conversation detailed in our last chapter took place.

There had been a grand hop at the West End Hotel, and among the attendants were the banker, General Hubberton, and his wife.

The general seemed to be in excellent spirits, and although as a rule he seldom danced, yet on this occasion he joined in three of the formal square dances.

It was a little after midnight when the hop ended, and as the general and his wife prepared to depart, the banker remarked to her:

"By the way, we will have to walk home, for I neglected to tell John to come for us; but as it is only a few steps, and it is a delightful night, it will not incommode us any."

"For such a short distance it is hardly worth while to ride," the wife replied.

And then the two set out.

When the pair arrived at their cottage, the lady noticed that none of the servants appeared to be about, and mentioned the fact.

"There is only a couple in the house," the banker explained. "There is a jollification to-night, and as they all wanted to attend, with the exception of the housemaid and the cook, I told them that they might go."

The banker and his wife occupied separate apartments, after the fashion of the folks who ape the manners and customs of the European grandes; but, on this occasion, the banker went with his wife to her apartment, seated himself in an easy-chair, and looked at the woman in a way which plainly revealed to her searching eyes that there was a weight on his mind.

"What is the matter—aren't you well?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; I am well enough in body, but I can't say as much for my mind," he replied, with a grave shake of the head.

"I have noticed that you haven't seemed like yourself for the last few days, but you

ought not to allow the cares of business to weigh you down," the lady urged.

"Ah, well; a man cannot always throw off his cares at will," the general replied with an air of discouragement.

"But, my dear, I should really think that you could afford to give up business," the wife remarked. "I do not see why a man, situated as you are, should make such a slave of himself. Why, this is about the first real vacation that I have known you to take since we were married."

"And, this isn't the right kind of a vacation for you to take, either. At a place like this you meet your business associates, and talk over your affairs, so that, although you do not go to the office, you always have your business in your mind."

"That is very true."

"Now, if I were you, I would go off to some nice, quiet place, away back in the country, or in the woods somewhere, where no daily papers come, and you could get out of the reach of the telegraph, so it would not be possible for you to know how affairs were going on in the commercial world."

"That is a very sensible bit of advice," the banker observed, thoughtfully. "Under such conditions I could, undoubtedly, relieve my mind of a great deal of care."

"Oh, yes; and I am certain it would do you a world of good."

"But, you wouldn't care to accompany me to such a place," he remarked, surveying her with a peculiar glance.

"Why not?"

"Because there wouldn't be any enjoyment there for you; no chance to wear your fine dresses or to display your jewelry—no hops, you know, or parties—"

"Oh, what do you suppose I care for such things!" the woman protested, impatiently.

And then in an impulsive way, she came and knelt by his side, clasped his hands, and looked up in his face.

"I would be willing to go anywhere with you if I thought the trip would do you good. I am a woman, of course, and have a natural love for dresses and jewelry and pretty things, but I think more of you than I do of anything else, and I am quite willing to go and bury myself a hundred miles from town if I thought it would do you any good."

The old banker was visibly affected by the speech, and he bent over and kissed the woman's forehead.

"Well, Angelina, you do care something for the old man," he said, slowly.

"Of course I do, and I would be very glad to give you a proof of it. I have always been honest with you, right from the beginning," and she spoke earnestly. "When we first met in England I was an actress earning a poor living on the stage, for I was not one of the talented kind, depending more upon my looks than upon the ability I possessed to act, and you were foolish enough to fall in love with me. I told you then the story of my life without any hesitation."

"I had been well brought up, the daughter of a country teacher, but at his sudden death had been thrown upon my own resources and compelled to earn my own bread."

"From the time I was a child I had taken part in private theatricals; so when I had to depend upon myself for a living I naturally turned to the stage. But I was not particularly successful, though I managed to live."

"Then came the romance of my life. I made the acquaintance of a gentleman of good family. I thought he was a great catch, so when he asked me to marry him, I gladly consented."

"After marriage it did not take me long to discover that my husband was a scamp of the first water. He was a scion of a good family, that is true; but his people had cast him off long before, for he was a gambler, a cheat, an all-around rascal; and, although he always tried to arrange his games so the law couldn't get hold of him, yet few men more richly deserved to be punished."

"He and his confederates had picked me out for a decoy; being stylish and attractive I lured young men, with more money than brains, and then my husband and his gang plundered them at cards."

"Yes, I remember your confession and I was amazed at your honesty."

"Because you sought me for your wife

and I did not think it was right to deceive you. I was weak enough to cling to my husband, and allow myself to be used as a lure, but then, the man always treated me well, seldom ever giving me a cross word."

"But, at last, he and his confederates got into trouble and were obliged to flee from England, and under the circumstances it was not possible for them to be burdened with a woman."

"My husband bade me good-by, and gave me fifty pounds, all the money he could spare."

"He was honest enough to inform me that it was probably our farewell parting, for he had come to the conclusion that he could get along a great deal better if he was not compelled to look out for me, and, as the kind of life which he led he knew was obnoxious to me, he did not doubt I would be glad to go back to the stage again."

"And this was the truth, for I was always in fear that, through some carelessness, we would all be arrested and dragged to a jail; so I replied that, although I hadn't anything to complain of in regard to his treatment, yet I really did not care if we separated, for I lived in mortal dread of falling into the hands of the police."

"You see, there had never been much sentiment between my husband and myself. I was a woman of thirty when I met him, and had got rid of all my romantic school-girl notions about undying love, and all that sort of thing."

"When the man saw that I was perfectly satisfied to separate, he expressed his satisfaction at finding me so reasonable, and told me not to trouble myself in regard to my marriage with him in case I ever met any other man who took a fancy me."

"I never should claim you, or make any trouble, you know," he declared.

"I would not dare to do it, for I should get myself in a hole immediately," he continued, "for, you see, I was foolish enough once to marry a woman for her money when I needed cash badly, and if she discovered that I had taken another wife, she would, undoubtedly, do her best to have me punished."

"A cool sort of a rascal," the banker observed.

"Oh, yes; I was not surprised by the declaration, for I had a suspicion that I was not the first woman whom he had married," the banker's wife remarked, with a laugh.

"In fact, I would not have been surprised if he had told me that he had half a dozen wives besides myself."

"Then I went back to the stage again, and remained there until I made your acquaintance."

"You were generous to marry me, although I frankly told you my history, and since you have been so good to me, you can rely upon my doing all I can for you."

"Suppose I should tell you, Angelina, that I am on the brink of ruin—that, for the past three months, I have only kept my head above water by using the securities intrusted to me by my customers, and in order to get money on these securities I have committed forgery a dozen times?" the banker said, in deep, suppressed tones.

"Oh, that would be dreadful!" the woman remarked, but in a calm, matter-of-fact way, adding: "I am not so surprised as I would have been if I had not suspected that your affairs were not going on favorably, but I did not think you had compromised yourself."

"I could not help myself, and, of course, it was the old story. I took the money, thinking to be able to replace it, but the market went against me, and now the end has come, for the discovery of my true condition can no longer be averted."

"To-morrow the world will know that I cannot meet my obligations, and the moment an investigation is made into my affairs, it will be found that I helped myself to all the valuables within my reach without regard to their ownership."

"But you are surely not going to remain here and face the consequences?" the wife exclaimed. "Why not endeavor to escape before the revelation comes?"

"I have the hundred dollars which you gave me last week. As it happened, I did not spend it; and then my diamonds and

jewelry will surely bring three or four thousand dollars."

"But, if you give me all you have got, how will you get along?" the banker asked, a peculiar expression on his face.

"Oh, I will get on all right. I can sell my dresses and go back to the stage; so don't worry about me. The main thing is for you to get out of the way before the explosion comes; then, if you succeed in escaping and get to some place where the United States extradition law can't touch you, it will be an easy matter to write for me to join you—that is, if you have not got tired of me," she added with a wistful look into his face.

The old man stooped and imprinted a warm kiss upon her full red lips.

"Oh, no, my darling; I have not tired of you, and this proof that you have given me of your devotion binds me still closer to you!" the banker declared.

"But I am not quite so badly off as to be obliged to take your money and jewels. I foresaw the inevitable a week or so ago, and have made preparation to go to parts unknown."

"I had confidence enough in you to believe that you would be willing to accompany me, but I was not exactly sure of it, for you women take strange notions into your heads sometimes."

"You have been good to me, and I will go anywhere with you," the wife declared.

"We will be off to-night, then!" the banker announced. "I have saved a few thousand dollars out of the wreck, and have taken passage for you and myself in a ship bound for Brazil."

"The captain is a man who owes his position to me, and, being an honest fellow, is willing to do anything to oblige me."

"But, to prevent the possibility of treachery, I did not let the captain know that I was going, but arranged with him for passage for a friend of mine and his wife."

"The vessel now lies in the 'Horseshoe,' just inside of Sandy Hook and by means of our one-horse carriage, we can go to Seabright, where a boat will be in waiting to take us on board."

"I have provided a couple of large canvas bags which will hold about as much as a trunk—you will find them in the closet there—for you to put your things in."

"Then, after you and the bags are in the boat, I will start the horse down the road, and if he doesn't come straight home he will wander off, and when he is found in the morning, no clue will be afforded to us."

"I will be ready as soon as possible!" she said.

An hour later the pair were safe on board the ship, and the voyage to the far-distant shores of Brazil had begun.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE ROBBERY.

As the banker had anticipated, on the morning which followed the night, during which he had taken flight, the truth in regard to his affairs became known.

The people interested in the matter, who were in New York, believed that the banker was at the summer city, and those at Long Branch, when warned by telegraph that the banker had "gone to smash," supposed he was in New York.

Some of the creditors, discovering that they had been swindled, at once swore out warrants for Hubberton's arrest, and soon the officers of the law were hot on the trail.

That is, figuratively speaking; they would have been "hot on the trail" if they had been able to find one, but there was no trail.

The horse had come home with the carriage, all right, and when the sleuth bounds learned this fact they at once jumped to the conclusion that the turn-out had been used to convey the fugitives to some point where they could take a train, but were not able to discover what particular train the pair had taken.

The absconding banker had planned his escape shrewdly enough, but, the man who successfully fled from human justice could not escape the Divine.

During the voyage he was taken sick and died in mid-ocean, where his body was soon committed to the deep.

A few days after this event an English ship, bound for Liverpool, spoke the Brazil-bound vessel, and the widow gladly improved the opportunity to return to her native land.

The general had absconded with a trifle over twenty thousand dollars, so the woman was tolerably well provided with money.

But, those who expect to thrive on ill-gotten gains seldom realize their anticipations.

The widow put this money with the Barings while she was looking for a permanent investment; the Barings failed, and the money was lost!

Her diamonds and jewelry were honestly come by, though. She raised money by their sale and went into the millinery business in which she prospered exceedingly.

And now, to return to the man who had been Angelina's first husband.

As the reader has doubtless anticipated, it was Fitz Gerald; and it was he and the captain who had committed the diamond robberies.

The pair were in need of money and the Englishman had suggested that it would not be a difficult matter for him, during the dance, to steal some of his partner's diamonds, then, at a certain signal, the captain would pass by Fitz Gerald and he could transfer the stolen trinkets to the Irishman.

As soon as the "swag" was in his hands the captain would leave the ball room, so that if the loss was discovered, and an investigation set on foot, it would not be possible for any "meddling" detective to find the jewels in the Englishman's possession.

As the two were playing a game of this kind, the boldest they had ever attempted, it was no wonder, when they discovered that the California widow believed she could take care of her diamonds without having recourse to the hotel safe, their cupidity was at once excited.

And the job seemed to be such an easy one, too: thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds intrusted to the care of a common trunk, guarded by an ordinary lock!

To them it seemed like tempting Providence, and so they speedily arranged a scheme to relieve the widow of her possessions.

They noted that she seemed averse to displaying her jewels during the day, wearing only a modest pair of ear-drops, worth a hundred dollars, possibly, no more.

The game which they concocted was an extremely simple one.

The Englishman, seeing that the lady seemed favorably inclined to him, did his best to make a favorable impression upon her.

The banker's daughter was no longer in the way, for, after her father's disgrace became public, she had suddenly departed.

Even she had not escaped, for the general had used twenty thousand dollars' worth of her securities, and as she loved money this was decidedly a harder blow than that her parent should turn out to be a rascal.

The two plotters had concluded that it would be best to get at the diamonds as soon as possible, and therefore were ready to take advantage of the first opportunity.

They had canvassed the matter thoroughly, and decided that if they could manage to get both Mrs. MacGregor and her secretary out of the way for an hour or so, it would be best to attempt to get the jewels in the daytime.

Just about one o'clock would be the most favorable time, in their opinion, for then it would be safe to calculate that almost everybody who had rooms on the floor where the widow's rooms were situated would be downstairs.

It was an easy matter for the Irishman to provide himself with a skeleton-key, by means of which to gain admission to the room.

Then the next move was to get a key to fit the lock of the trunk.

And in this, too, he was successful.

"Now, then, me b'ye, all I want is an opportunity, and I will be afther doing the trick to the queen's taste!" McCracken declared.

Fortune favored the conspirators, for on

the very next day after they had completed their arrangements, the lady, in a conversation with Fitz Gerald, told him that she was obliged to go to New York on business, and would not return until late in the afternoon.

This information was given to the Englishman about ten o'clock in the morning, and half an hour later, the widow, accompanied by her secretary, departed.

McCracken, unwilling to take any chances, played the spy upon the widow so as to be absolutely certain that she had gone.

He was in high glee when he returned to the hotel.

"It is all right, me b'ye!" he exclaimed to the Englishman, who was awaiting his arrival on the veranda. "I saw thim off, so there isn't any mistake about that same!"

"We had better wait until about twelve o'clock, I think," Fitz Gerald observed. "For by that time the floor will be practically deserted."

"Oh, yis, we must do the job up as n'ately as possible, for we want to be afther arranging the matter so that there will not be the least taste of a trace as to how the jewels were taken, do ye mind?"

"Certainly! we must do our best to cover up our tracks," Fitz Gerald replied. "If we succeed, a fearful row will be kicked up, for it is not often that cracksmen get away with thirty or forty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds."

"I should say not! Why, me b'ye, it will be like walking off wid a whole jewelry store!" and the Irishman grinned at his joke.

The pair waited until it was five minutes of twelve; then they proceeded up-stairs.

The passageway was deserted, as they expected.

Proceeding to the door of Mrs. MacGregor's apartment, the captain unlocked it by means of his skeleton key.

The only danger to be apprehended was that some of the servants, who knew who occupied the room, might see them at the door, and would, of course, immediately understand that they hadn't any business in the apartment.

But the pair succeeded in getting into the room without being seen by any one.

"That is n'ate and aisy!" the Irishman declared, gleefully. "Now thin, if we can do as well wid the trunk, I will be satisfied."

He drew the key from his pocket which he had fitted to the trunk.

The problem which the pair had to solve was peculiar in some respects.

First, entrance to the room must be gained; then the trunk unlocked; but, the diamonds being secured, the hardest part of the job was to follow—the carrying away and disposing of the jewels.

The plan was to take a carriage which the captain had engaged, drive out into the pines, and, while on the way, drill a hole in the little safe door, by the lock, put in a good charge of gunpowder and blow it open.

In the deep recesses of the pines this could be easily accomplished without any one being the wiser.

Then they could bury the safe in the ground and so get that out of the way.

This done, they would drive direct to the railway station, and hoped to catch the two o'clock Express for the city.

They would reach the city a little after three, dispose of the diamonds to the old "fence," the receiver of stolen goods, with whom they had already done considerable business, and, in another hour, be on their way to the summer city again.

As the captain had remarked, in an admiring way:

"It is an illigant scheme entirely, and the odds are a thousand to one that we will be afther doing the trick!"

The captain found no more difficulty in getting into the trunk than he had in gaining access to the room.

Another moment and the miniature safe was in his hands.

"Come out of there, ye murdering blaguard!" McCracken exclaimed, in high delight, as he took the little iron box from the trunk.

The safe was only about eight inches square, and Fitz Gerald was provided with a hand sachel just big enough to contain it.

Of course, it was the most natural thing in the world for a man going to New York to carry a small sachel.

"Now, I'll lock the trunk again, and thin we will be off!" McCracken exclaimed.

He closed the lid of the trunk, locked it, removed the key, which he returned to his pocket, and rose to his feet.

"Now, if we can succeed in leaving the room, locking the door, and getting out of the neighborhood without anybody seeing us we are all right," Fitz Gerald observed.

"Oho! the odds are big, me b'ye, that we are going to be afther doing that same, all right!" the Irishman declared confidently, as the pair advanced toward the door.

But, a disagreeable surprise awaited them.

The door opened suddenly, and two men stood on the portal, with revolvers drawn, while in the background stood the Californian widow and her secretary!

The man in the advance was Joe Phenix, now carefully disguised. He was the old Californian whom the astute Irishman had picked out for a victim!

Back of the supposed Californian stood Tony Western—the always on-hand Tony.

The thieves were thunderstruck, for the surprise was complete.

"Now, my men, have the kindness to extend your hands so we can snap the bracelets on your wrists," Joe Phenix said in his judicial way.

"Howly smoke!" cried the Irishman, completely astonished, and correspondingly disgusted.

"What does this mean?" Fitz Gerald angrily demanded.

"Oh, come, now, don't try to play the innocent and indignant dodger!" Joe Phenix observed. "Perhaps you are not aware that I have the next room, and through an ingeniously contrived hole have seen all going on in this apartment."

The captured men looked at each other, and the deep disgust which they felt at this unexpected revelation was plainly apparent on their features.

"I presume by this time you comprehend that a trap has been laid for you?" Joe Phenix remarked. "The game which has been played is a very old one, but it seems to work all the same. This lady was put forward as a bait," and the veteran nodded to Mrs. MacGregor as he spoke.

"And you bit without any hesitation. The result is that you both stand an excellent chance to go up the river for a full term."

"On with the handcuffs, Tony, and I will relieve you, Mr. Fitz Gerald, of the jewel safe."

Western snapped the manacles on the wrists of the prisoners, who by this time had recovered their composure.

They were fearfully angry at being thus skillfully entrapped, but were too old stagers to indulge in useless invectives or repining.

"You managed your game very well, and I judge from the way you worked it that neither one of you is a regular professional," Joe Phenix suggested.

"You are right in regard to that, sir," the Englishman admitted. "We neither of us pretend to be saints, but we never tried our hands at anything of this kind before, and after this unfortunate result it is not likely that we will ever do anything in this line again."

"We greatly needed money, yielded to temptation, and that is all there is to it," Fitz Gerald said in conclusion.

"Ye put up a n'ate job on us!" the captain admitted, with the air of a philosopher. "I thought I was up to a thrick or two, but I niver had a suspicion that we were walking into a trap."

The prisoners were given into the custody of a local officer.

In due time they were tried and convicted.

And, although both protested that they knew nothing of the other diamond robberies, yet, as after their arrest, no more occurred, their asseverations were not believed.

Our tale is told.

Well had the veteran detective's decoy spy done her work, and the indefatigable sleuth-hound had no better assistant than Mignon Lawrence, the Actress Detective, veritably Joe Phenix's Mascot.

THE END.

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